

Summer Nights

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/10942164) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/10942164>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Percy Jackson and the Olympians - Rick Riordan , Percy Jackson and the Olympians & Related Fandoms - All Media Types , The Heroes of Olympus - Rick Riordan , The Trials of Apollo - Rick Riordan
Relationships:	Nico di Angelo/Will Solace , Jason Grace/Piper McLean , Annabeth Chase/Percy Jackson
Characters:	Nico di Angelo , Will Solace , Jason Grace , Piper McLean , Annabeth Chase , Percy Jackson , Kayla Knowles , Austin Lake , Gleeson Hedge , Chuck Hedge , Hazel Levesque , Reyna Avila Ramírez-Arellano , Naomi Solace
Additional Tags:	more characters and ships will be added , probably a slow burn , Summer Project , after three years I'm finally writing a multi-chapter solangelo getting together fic , go me , post-BoO , pre-toa , Canon Compliant , 1-800-ANGST , also so much fluff that you will puke though , Frozen references oops , Reyna and Nico friendship , Hazel and Nico friendship , Jason and Nico and Percy friendship , ALL THE FRIENDSHIPS , I love reunions , follow @percyspillowpet on twitter for updates on how this fic is coming along , warning: you WILL hate me if you read this
Language:	English
Collections:	turns out im not over percy jackson , i have way too much time on my hands lemme reread this fic , Bugalicious Library
Stats:	Published: 2017-05-19 Completed: 2018-02-04 Words: 53,408 Chapters: 40/40

Summer Nights

by [percysspandapillowpet](#)

Summary

Night was Nico's favorite time of day.

He wasn't quite sure what it was that he so enjoyed—the darkness, perhaps, or the cold, or the quiet—but out of all the activities Chiron planned for Camp Half-Blood's daytime schedule, none could compare to Nico's favorite pastime—sitting on the roof of his cabin just as dusk began to swallow the sun.

Winner of the Solangelo Fic Awards 2018 (Best Unfinished Chaptered)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

Alright, gang, here we go. Yes, I've been wanting to write a fic like this ever since BoO was released. Yes, it's been three years and I still haven't done that. But I've decided to make this a bit of a summer project.

Now, I usually don't post chaptered fics until they are completed so I can post the chapters once a day/every other day/in some other consistent manner, but I've decided that I want you guys to experience it while I am, too. I have no idea where this is going to go, to be honest, and I want feedback along the way (not that I'm taking specific suggestions or anything, though).

Please enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Night was Nico's favorite time of day.

He wasn't quite sure what it was that he so enjoyed—the darkness, perhaps, or the cold, or the quiet—but out of all the activities Chiron planned for Camp Half-Blood's daytime schedule, none could compare to Nico's favorite pastime—sitting on the roof of his cabin just as dusk began to swallow the sun.

Bliss. Not a soul (dead or alive) to bother him, left alone with just his thoughts. And, yeah, those were sometimes as annoying as any person could be, but sitting up there he could allow the gentle breeze to chill his skin, rustle his hair, and clear away some of that burden. Seeing the camp, the forest, and the ocean from an elevated point of view seemed to change his perspective on life, as well, and caused all his problems to temporarily dissipate.

The stars were nice, too. He used to know all the constellations, back in Italy and before there was too much light pollution to see them in a place like New York City. He would never admit it, but he loved the stars far more than the sun, and he sometimes felt, sitting up so high, that he could reach out and grab them. Once he even tried, but then lowered his hand in embarrassment.

That was another great thing about night—no one could see him. He could do whatever he wanted, and no one would ever have to know. He could sit up here in a clown suit. Or a tuxedo. Or nothing at all.

His flannel pajamas were nice, too, though. He liked how the fabric was just thick enough to keep him warm but just thin enough that he could still get shivers from the slowly-cooling air.

His summer nights were of the utmost importance. His summer nights were his only opportunities for real peace and quiet. His summer nights were his and his alone.

And that's why he was so goddamn pissed when a stupid dorky Apollo child happened by his cabin during a random midnight stroll, took one glance at him, and screamed.

"Nico? Is that you?!"

Nico sighed. He had two options—respond or ignore. If he ignored him, Will might start to panic and self-diagnose hallucinations, which would be hilarious. If he responded...well, he'd start something a bit more daunting—a conversation.

Yeah, Nico was no good with words. Especially not with guys he may or may not find extremely attractive. Maybe that's why *being alone* and *total silence* were so appealing.

And with that in mind, he chose to ignore.

"Nico!" Will shouted again. "You really shouldn't be up there. It's not safe. You could fall and break your arm or something!"

Idiot. He was just going to keep yelling, wasn't he? Ridiculous. He was going to wake up the entire camp. If Will valued his life at all, he best have shut up.

But he didn't.

"Come on, Nico! Please!" He was waving his arms like a lunatic now, too. "You can't hide from me. I know you're up there!"

Nico sighed again. Perhaps a better choice would be to say something brief, just to shoo him away, and then return to stoic silence. Yes, that would work.

"Go away."

Well, it did shut Will up, but when Nico glanced at the look on his face, he instantly regretted it.

His eyes were wide, his mouth even more so, like Nico had just thrown a dead fish at him. Which would have been a good idea, if he had one. But he didn't think about that at the time, because Will looked quite...offended, if Nico's emotional radar was working.

That was okay. He was used to offending people. Happened all the time, being the son of Death and gay and impartial to other peoples' feelings. What he wasn't comfortable with, however, was just how quickly Will's expression shifted from offense to concern.

Seriously. It was like he flipped a light switch.

And then, saying absolutely nothing, Will Solace walked inside Nico's cabin.

Confused at first as to what exactly his intentions were, Nico almost called out to him, but it was too late. Will had already closed the door.

It reminded him of a little scenario that had happened just over a week ago, right after Will had finished prescribing Nico a three-day infirmary stay. Will had walked him up to the building, chatting all the way, but had then suddenly stopped, opened the door, stepped through, and closed it behind him. Nico, totally confounded, had stood there for a good three minutes before finally making the decision to walk in himself.

When he approached Will, who had been working with a bedridden patient, and asked him *what the hell that was for*, he simply responded that he had wanted Nico to make the choice to stay in the infirmary of his own accord. That may have gained Will a tiny bit of respect and given Nico a tiny bit of heart palpitations.

Then Nico realized why Will had walked into his cabin with such eagerness, and he couldn't help bursting into laughter. Of course, within a few moments, he came right back out again and started pacing along the front porch and shouting again.

"Nico, how did you even get up there? I didn't see stairs or a ladder or—oh, no, you *didn't*." He pointed an accusatory finger and Nico was almost a little scared. Almost.

But he was still laughing uncontrollably.

"Nico di Angelo, I *told* you, no shadow-travel for *three months!* What is it about the word *no* that you can't understand?"

Nico shrugged. "What can I say, Solace—I'm a rule breaker."

"You are not," Will grumbled. "You never miss curfew, you're never late for training. You never get caught doing stupid stuff around camp—except for *this*." After finishing, Will instantly buried his face in his hands. "Sorry. I didn't mean to sound like a stalker."

"Apology accepted," Nico replied flatly. "I'm sorry for shadow-travelling."

Will nodded then. "Accepted as well—on one condition."

"What's that?"

Will pointed at him and then the ground. "You're coming back down here."

Nico shook his head. "No, actually, I—"

"And you're bringing me back up there with you."

It took a few seconds for Nico to get his jaw working again. "Uh, what?"

"You heard me."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, Nico, I'm sure. Come on, get down here. Please?"

He sounded way too hopeful for his own good. Nico wasn't sure what kind of fun he thought hanging out with the most morbid demigod alive on top of the most depressing cabin would be, but he wasn't one to judge. Also, he had learned over the past week that it was very, very hard to say no to Will Solace.

"Fine."

Chapter End Notes

I didn't want to do Three Days at the Infirmary because everyone has already done it and I've tried and failed at it multiple times. I also feel that it would be a lot more boring in reality than our fantastical headcanons. Knowing Nico, he'd probably sleep the entire seventy-two hours.

So, in short, this story begins about a week after the infirmary stuff. I hope you enjoy, and let me know if you even want to see another chapter (I'm writing one anyway).

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

“What’s your pain on a scale of one to ten?”

“Better than last time.”

Will pondered this for a moment, shifting his gaze to nothing in particular and murmuring silently to himself. Then he resumed his Nico-scrutinization. “Last time you said four, correct? So what is it now, a three? Two?”

Nico shook his head. “More like a one, I guess. It’s just a little scratch, anyway.”

“Just a little scratch,” Will echoed under his breath like it was a curse. “A little scratch.

Di Angelo, what am I going to do with you?”

Chapter Notes

I give you fair warning--this update was probably faster than the rest are going to be.
Nonetheless, enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Nico slipped into the shadows.

When he appeared again on the ground, he wasn’t expecting such an enthusiastic gasp.

“Okay,” Will said, fanning his face like the idiot he was, “I know I’m not supposed to say this as your doctor and all, but that shadow-travel thing is really freaking cool.”

Nico felt himself smile a little. His ten-year-old self would have loved this. “Yeah. I guess it’s alright. You might not like it so much after experiencing it yourself, though. Percy almost threw up his first time and said he felt like his face was peeling off.”

Will frowned a little at that, but quickly regained his composure and held out his hand. “Well, I’m ready as I’ll ever be.”

Nico *really* didn’t want to grab Will’s hand (as much as he did want to deep down somewhere), so he held on to his forearm instead. “Okay. Three, two, one...”

He whisked them both into the shadows.

When they reappeared on the roof, Will managed to stay on his feet for a total of one second before toppling over and yanking Nico down with him. He would have fallen off the cabin

and hit the ground twelve feet below if it hadn't been for Nico catching his wrist and pulling him back up to the peak. When he turned around, his face was sickly pale.

Nico scooted away quickly. "Don't throw up on me."

Will frowned. "Thanks. Good to know you care about my health."

Nico just shrugged. "I figured you wouldn't take it well, being a son of Apollo and all."

"Hmph. If this is how it always feels, I'm prohibiting you from it for six months."

"No."

After a moment, Will moved closer and cleared his throat. "So, what's up?"

Nico shifted away. "I told you—nothing." He had fleetingly hoped that the shadow-traveling would have distracted Will from his mission, but apparently that was not the case.

Will didn't try to move closer to him again, for which Nico was very grateful, but he did continue the pressing questions. "Is it health-related? How are your stitches doing?"

Nico shrugged. "They're fine."

"What's your pain on a scale of one to ten?"

"Better than last time."

Will pondered this for a moment, shifting his gaze to nothing in particular and murmuring silently to himself. Then he resumed his Nico-scrutinization. "Last time you said four, correct? So what is it now, a three? Two?"

Nico shook his head. "More like a one, I guess. It's just a little scratch, anyway."

"*Just a little scratch,*" Will echoed under his breath like it was a curse. "A little scratch. Di Angelo, what am I going to do with you?"

"You could stop asking me questions."

"Mean," Will huffed. "I'm just trying to accurately gauge your condition."

"Don't say things like that when you're off duty," Nico replied. "It's annoying."

"Is it?" Will asked, sounding genuinely interested.

"Yeah."

"Good," he retorted. "Because I don't care."

Nico crossed his arms and faced the stars again. "Fine."

Will followed his gaze and suddenly gasped. "Wow."

Nico glanced at him for a moment, long enough to notice how wide his eyes were and how his mouth seemed to be stuck open a little (probably from all the talking). “Wow what?”

Will pointed up at the sky as if Nico wasn’t already looking. (He was. He wasn’t looking at Will anymore, definitely not.) “The stars. I’ve been here so long, but I’ve never really noticed how visible they are before.”

“That’s because you’ve never sat on a cabin roof at midnight before.”

“An activity that I will *not* be participating in again.”

“You sure about that?”

He didn’t get a response. Both were silent for a few moments, staring above them at what seemed to be both an endless void and an array of possibilities. It wasn’t until after he started coughing that Will spoke up again.

“Alright,” he said. “I guess I do kind of like this, even if it’s dangerous. So here’s my offer—no more questions tonight, but I get to come back up here tomorrow with some better ones, and you have to give me some answers.”

Nico kept his eyes locked on the sky, because he knew that if he took even one glance at Will Solace he might want to push him off the roof. “Are you serious?”

“Absolutely. Tomorrow night, eleven o’ clock sharp. You better be here.”

Nico finally turned back to him. “Fine, I guess.”

Will nodded. “Good. Now, do you have a ladder or something—”

“Behind us, trapdoor’s open. Back door of the cabin’s unlocked,” he replied.

“I knew it. You little shit.” Will turned until he saw the top rung and then began climbing down. “See you tomorrow, hopefully.” Then he glanced at his watch. “Or today, rather. Nice talking to you, Nico.”

Nico nodded as he disappeared behind the back of his cabin, and then he turned back to face the stars.

He didn’t realize until minutes later that he hadn’t had a chance to ask Will what he was doing out so late in the first place. *Tomorrow*, he told himself. *Tomorrow. He wants to see me tomorrow. I can ask him then.* But then the irrational part of his mind kicked in. *Does he actually, though? Or is that just an expression—“see you tomorrow?” It sounds pretty generic.*

He shook the thoughts away as quickly as they came. *No. I don’t need this right now. And I don’t care either way.*

But hours later, as he climbed into bed and willed himself to sleep, all he could imagine was moonlight reflecting off of pale blue eyes.

Chapter End Notes

What do y'all think so far? I'm enjoying writing this; I hope you like reading it!

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Will folded his arms. “You think I’m a monster? I’m offended, di Angelo.”

Nico shrugged. “Hey, just trying to be safe. A lot of creepy things can morph themselves to look like humans.”

“Well,” Will huffed, “how can I prove to you that I’m really me?”

Deciding to go along with it—why not? he figured—Nico brought a finger to his chin and hummed. “What’s something only Will Solace would know?” he murmured.

“Something about...oh! I’ve got it.”

Will leaned forward, hands on his knees. “I’m ready.”

Chapter Notes

This one's a bit longer--enjoy.

Side note: I'm not reading any of this, just posting it immediately after I finish it because I hate editing my own stuff when I don't have to. If you see any typos, let me know.

Incessant knocking was never a pleasant sound to wake up to, and it was particularly irksome to Nico when the person behind the door was tall and strong enough to beat him up if he was to try to retaliate.

Threats would have to do instead.

“Jason,” he hissed through gritted teeth, “it’s six A.M. I’m not awake yet. If you don’t leave me the *fuck* alone, I swear to *Zeus’ ass* I will—”

“But we’re playing capture the flag!”

“No.”

“Come on, it’s my last game before Piper and I have to go out and do all this stupid *Pontifex* stuff—”

“I said *no*.”

“Nico—”

He didn't hesitate in slamming the door shut, even if it almost took off four of Jason's fingers. The knocking started again as soon as it stopped however, and Nico was forced to make a decision. He glanced quickly in his bedside mirror, ran his hands through his hair, picked some semi-clean skinny jeans from the pile on the floor, pulled them on along with some Converse, and opened the door again.

Jason's face lit up like a lightning bolt. "Yes! I knew you'd agree eventually."

"I never said I did," Nico grumbled, but he closed the door behind him.

Jason smiled. "Yeah, totally. Anyway, we really need you for this game. We got permission from Chiron to hold a match with just the older kids, and he said it has to be before breakfast, so that's why we're up so early."

"Great," Nico replied. "And you didn't think to notify me about this sudden occurrence, hmm, let's say—last night?"

As they began walking toward the woods, Jason slung an arm around his shoulders, which was immediately shoved off. "Sorry, man. It was kind of a last minute thing, and nobody knew where you were."

Someone did, Nico thought. He felt his face heating up at the memory, and he attempted to shove it away. It was just a conversation. Just a stupid conversation with a stupid guy on a stupid roof looking at stupid stars. And there were some stupid laughs and stupid smiles and stupid plans were made to do it again.

"Speaking of which," Jason continued, "where were you? We were all at Percy's after the campfire." He leaned in closer. "Past curfew, so don't tell Chiron. But we missed you! What were you up to?"

"Oh, I was with him."

Both whirled around and came face-to-face with none other than the stupid guy himself.

"Hey, Will!" Jason smiled and stopped in his tracks. He then tossed Nico a sideways smirk. "Well, that makes a lot more sense now."

Nico would have slapped him if he were more awake. Instead, he resorted to a signature death glare.

Will cleared his throat, and Nico prayed to all the gods he could think of that he hadn't caught on to their little exchange. "So, I've got to go rally Cecil and Lou Ellen and a few others for this game. They won't want to see me fraternizing with the enemy." He grinned and began walking backwards toward the cabins. "I'll see you later!"

Nico wasn't sure if that was directed at just him or Jason too, and he wasn't sure why he was so curious to know.

"So." Jason nudged his shoulder. "What were you two up to last night?"

Nico stared at the ground, unmoving. “Nothing.”

“It was obviously not *nothing*.”

Nico kicked him in the shin.

“Ow!” Jason shook out his ankle, stumbling backwards. “Okay, okay. I’ll stop. But I’m glad you’re reaching out to people, Nico. You’ve got some great friends.”

Nico raised an eyebrow. “Conceited much?”

Jason laughed. “You know what I mean. But, hey, that means you *do* consider me a friend.”

“Oh my gods, Jason. Shut up. Just shut up.”

Just then, they were interrupted by Annabeth running up to them, blueprints tucked under both arms.

“Strategy meeting,” she shouted. “Now.”

To Nico, the teams seemed a bit unfair—not that it mattered to him, however. It was just a dumb game.

He and Percy and Jason along with Annabeth and Piper and their respective cabins were on the blue side, and all the rest were red—mostly Ares, Hermes, and Apollo campers along with a few random others. No camper under fourteen was allowed, and though Annabeth claimed it was to give the head counselors a break, everyone agreed that in reality, she wanted to spare them from her insane new battle plans.

“Alright, everyone.” She was speaking from a boulder, addressing all over her team members from above. “Are you ready?”

“Yeah!” everyone chorused.

She nodded and smiled. “Good. Let’s win this thing! Places, please!”

Nico had been assigned to patrol the eastern border—after insisting that he did *not* want to go offense—and so he reappeared underneath a tree by the creek. As soon as he arrived, someone screamed.

“Geez, Nico—a little warning next time!”

Nico whirled around. Standing there was, of course, Will. Why did the universe seem to have a personal vendetta against him?

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

Will coughed. “Uh, guarding my team’s border. At least I was until you scared me half to death.” Realizing his word choice, he grinned. “No pun intended.”

“Not funny,” Nico grumbled.

“You’re a border patrol, too, I’m guessing?” Nico nodded. “Good. You better have something interesting to talk about, because this job gets real boring real fast.”

Nico hadn’t even considered that. Again—why, universe? Why?

“I’ve got nothing,” he replied.

Will hummed to himself and then began to walk forward. Nico watched in utter disbelief as he carefully stepped over the creek, past him, and took a seat on a nearby boulder.

“Will.”

He glanced up, and Nico could tell he was feigning innocence. “Yeah?”

Nico stepped closer. “You do realize that you just crossed into my team’s territory, and if I tag you right now, you’re going to jail.”

Will smirked. “And?”

“You’re not taking this game very seriously, are you?”

“How dare you accuse me of such treachery,” Will said flatly. “But yeah. I don’t really feel like playing much.” He placed his hand on the face of the rock. “Come on; sit down.”

Nico didn’t move. “If this is about continuing last night’s conversation, then the answer is no.”

Will raised his hands in mock surrender. “Hey, I never said anything about that. Our meeting is still on for eleven tonight.” He mentioned for Nico to sit down again. “Relax. You need it.”

Nico could have argued against that last point, but he didn’t want to waste energy. Instead, he sat down on the rock next to Will—a good, safe distance away.

Will, of course, immediately scooted closer. “Jeez, I don’t bite.”

Nico raised an eyebrow. “Well, how am I supposed to know? You could be a monster. You never know what you’re gonna find in these woods.”

Will folded his arms. “You think I’m a monster? I’m offended, di Angelo.”

Nico shrugged. “Hey, just trying to be safe. A lot of creepy things can morph themselves to look like humans.”

“Well,” Will huffed, “how can I prove to you that I’m really me?”

Deciding to go along with it—why not? he figured—Nico brought a finger to his chin and hummed. “What’s something only Will Solace would know?” he murmured. “Something about...oh! I’ve got it.”

Will leaned forward, hands on his knees. “I’m ready.”

“Okay.” Nico cleared his throat. “If you are really Will Solace, you would know *exactly* what you said to me when you first saw my werewolf scratches in the infirmary.”

Will grinned. “That’s too easy. I took one glance and shouted *holy fucking Zeus, Nico!*” He shakes his head at the memory. “Too many little children heard me that day. I got a scolding from Lou Ellen.”

Nico nods. “Acceptable answer. Now, second question—”

He was rudely interrupted by a far-off shout. “Hey, Nico, a little help over here would be nice!”

He cursed under his breath and rose from his seat. “That’s Jason. I should go.”

Will stood also, brushing off his shorts. “Don’t tell them I was here.”

Nico rolled his eyes. “Don’t worry; I won’t. It’s just a stupid game.”

That raised an eyebrow. “And I won’t tell Annabeth you said that.”

“Deal,” Nico said.

“Deal,” Will agreed, retreating back toward the river. “And, hey, remember—tonight, your cabin roof, eleven! Be prepared for emotional inquiry!”

Nico would never admit later that his heart skipped a beat as Will smirked at him from across the creek. “I’ll be ready.”

Truth was, he wasn’t. Not at all.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

“Psst! Hey, Nico!”

Speak of the devil. Nico was pulled from his thoughts when he noticed him standing on the ground below, waving up at him and sporting a smile that held far too much enthusiasm.

“Why are you whispering?” he hissed.

“I don’t know!” Will replied, still using the same tone. “Why are you?”

“Because you were!”

“We’re getting nowhere! Just let me into your cabin!”

“It’s unlocked, doofus.”

“Oh.”

Chapter Notes

This is a good one, in my humble opinion. Enjoy.

True to his word, Nico climbed up to his roof just before eleven that night, listening to the dying laughter and fading voices that echoed around the camp as the oldest demigods gradually rose from the amphitheater.

Nico had never been one for attending campfires, but he did occasionally these days. Since the war, which was nearly two weeks ago, he had spent at least an hour at five or six. He had been dragged against his will by Jason to the first, coaxed into the second by Annabeth after they had a nice conversation about World War II history, and reluctantly—but entirely by his own decision—showed up fashionably late to the third. He could still remember the expressions on their faces when he had walked right up to them and taken a seat next to Piper. They had been silent for a good thirty seconds before patting him on the head, smiling at him, asking him how his day was, and doing all other sorts of grossly affectionate things. His friends were great, and he knew their intentions were heartfelt, but they were terrible at trying to make him comfortable. Piper was the only one who ever seemed to notice this, and she had told them numerous times to quit it and just act natural, but they still went over-the-top sometimes.

Nico really didn’t mind, even if he usually pretended to. Truth was, he was infinitely grateful to all his friends for the effort to which they went just to make him feel appreciated.

His friends. It still felt weird to say that.

He was starting to understand them better, too. He could laugh along when Annabeth mimicked strangling Percy for saying something stupid. He could relate to Hazel's confusion when someone made a pop culture reference, and he no longer felt like an outcast because of it. He and Piper together constantly annoyed Jason about how his glasses never sat straight. And he could have some deeper, more meaningful conversations as well—they were tricky and far-between, but he was getting there.

There was one friend, however—could he even call him that yet?—that he could not wrap his mind around, no matter how hard he tried.

"Psst! Hey, Nico!"

Speak of the devil. Nico was pulled from his thoughts when he noticed him standing on the ground below, waving up at him and sporting a smile that held far too much enthusiasm.

"Why are you whispering?" he hissed.

"I don't know!" Will replied, still using the same tone. "Why are *you*?"

"Because you were!"

"We're getting nowhere! Just let me into your cabin!"

"It's unlocked, doofus."

"Oh."

Nico watched as Will tested the doorknob, found that it opened, gave him a quick thumbs up accompanied by a stupid grin, and stepped inside.

How was he supposed to cope with this guy? He had way too much energy and was way too cheerful and excitable and strangely adorable and incredibly attractive.

At that pleasant thought, Nico slapped himself across the face as hard as he could.

"What was that for?"

Initially confused that he had possibly developed an internal second voice, Nico whirled around and realized that it was just Will, who had made his way up the ladder and was crawling toward where Nico was seated at the edge of the roof.

"Nothing," he replied, turning back around.

Will settled down next to him, thankfully far enough away that Nico wasn't too uncomfortable. "Well, you were obviously mad at yourself about *something*."

Nico shook his head. "No. There was...a mosquito."

Will raised an eyebrow. "Really? A mosquito?" He nodded, and Will's eyes widened. "Oh, gods, did it bite you? Let me see, this could be infected..." He reached out, leaned forward,

and scrutinized Nico's cheek.

As much as he wanted to back away, he realized he couldn't if he wanted this lie to survive.

Thankfully, Will didn't keep at it for too long, though he definitely seemed closer than before once he pulled back. "Hm. Nothing. Good." Then he cleared his throat. "So."

Nico averted his gaze to the ground below, swinging his feet a little. Why did he have so much excess energy all of the sudden? "So."

Will folded his hands in his lap. "I would like to hear about what was bothering you yesterday."

Nico picked at a stray thread on his jeans. "I would...rather not talk about it."

Will sighed. "Pretend it's not me. Pretend I'm just a random doctor that you've never met before." He paused and then lowered his voice. "Not that I would tell anyone anyway, Nico. Ever heard of patient confidentiality?"

Nico glanced at him. "You sure you won't tell?"

Will nodded. "Very sure."

"Alright, then," he replied. "I'll tell you, on one condition—afterwards, you have to tell me what was bothering *you*."

"What? I'm not—I—"

"Will," Nico interrupted. "You were walking by yourself last night, out late, when you *explicitly* told me that you're an early bird. And you weren't even at the campfire with your siblings. So something's up."

There was something unreadable present in Will's eyes, but Nico caught a hint of a smirk.

"Nico di Angelo, is this what I think it is?"

"What?"

He leaned closer, definitely grinning now. "You're asking me to talk about my feelings. Meaning you're worried about me."

Nico huffed, looking to the sky to avoid an oncoming blush. "Um, no. Pfft. Why would you think that?" Then he tried one of his signature death glares. "I'm obviously just trying to make this *fair*, Will. If I have to talk about my feelings, then you have to talk about yours. That's how it works."

Will just smiled. "Okay. Whatever you say, Death Boy."

"I told you not to call me that! Do you want to be on my good side right now or not?"

“Oh, so you do have a good side?”

Nico groaned, burying his face in his hands and leaning on his knees. “I swear to *Hades*, Will —”

Will chuckled and tugged on Nico’s wrists. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I’ll just sit here and listen. You can tell me anything. I won’t interrupt; I promise.”

Nico swallowed. “Anything?”

“Anything.”

He exhaled, hating how shaky his breath sounded. “Is it okay if I...can I, like...tell you... everything?”

Will’s eyes widened for a moment, but then they softened. “Of course.”

So Nico did.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Nico punched his arm gently. “We made a deal, Will.” He hoped he said it teasingly enough that Will would smile a little. He hated seeing him look so...distraught.

Will was silent for a moment, still staring at his lap, but then he finally spoke again. “Alright. You know how your powers, like, wear you out when you use them too much?”

Chapter Notes

It's actually midnight right now and I'm just as exhausted as I make Nico out to be in this chapter, so beware of strange writing. Nevertheless, enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Bianca. His mom. The Lotus. Minos. Tartarus. Bryce Lawrence. Nico described it all.

Will listened intently the entire time, keeping quiet except for when Nico hesitated. In those moments, he placed a hand on his shoulder, reassured him that he was doing great, and then waited patiently for him to resume.

He skipped over his crush on Percy and his excursion with Jason to Diocletian’s palace. He definitely wasn’t ready to delve into either of those yet. It seemed as if Will could tell he was leaving something out by the end of his little monologue, however.

“Is that everything?” he asked, hand still on Nico’s shoulder. Nico had warmed up to it over the course of the conversation, and now instead of just butterflies in his stomach and a dangerously high heart rate, it was providing a stabilizing sort of comfort. He wondered briefly if it was a healer thing or just a Will thing.

“No,” he admitted. “It’s...well, it’s probably half of everything. But I can’t do it, Will, not now, I—”

“Hey.” Will leaned closer, and his hand seemed to grow warmer. Maybe it was just in Nico’s head, but he definitely seemed to be emitting some kind of calming-healer radiation power. It soothed his nerves and reminded him of a fleece blanket.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

“It’s okay,” Will replied. “You’ve said enough. You did really well. I’m proud of you, Nico.”

Proud. Proud of him. Maybe if Nico was a little more awake and a little less relaxed underneath Will’s touch he’d be able to fully process those words. At that moment, though, he was focused on fleece blankets.

“I’m tired,” he blurted.

Will finally took his hand away, and Nico would be lying if he said he didn’t immediately miss it a little. “You should go to bed.” He shifted as if he were about to get up, but then he hesitated. “Wait. You’re forgetting something.”

Nico muffled a yawn in his hand. “What?” When Will didn’t respond, he glanced over and noticed that his gaze was focused on his lap, where he was picking at a fingernail. “Will? What is it?”

“Well...remember that deal we made? How I’m supposed to tell you what was bothering me?”

“Oh.” Admittedly, Nico had completely forgotten already. “Yeah. So...what’s up?”

Will cleared his throat. “Uh, well, it’s going to seem really stupid compared to everything you’ve been through, to be honest.”

Nico quickly shook his head. “No, no, no. I don’t want it to be like this—you feeling bad for me all the time. Tell me. Come on.”

“But I—”

Nico punched his arm gently. “We made a deal, Will.” He hoped he said it teasingly enough that Will would smile a little. He hated seeing him look so...distraught.

Will was silent for a moment, still staring at his lap, but then he finally spoke again. “Alright. You know how your powers, like, wear you out when you use them too much?”

Nico nodded. “Yeah?”

Will still didn’t raise his eyes, but he continued. “Well, my healing abilities are sort of like that, too. Like, when I don’t take enough breaks in between patients, my hands get burned sometimes, and I get really drowsy.”

“Burned?” Nico echoed. “Can I...see?”

Will drew his hands close to his chest. “Um, I—”

He was cut off as Nico darted out and grabbed them, but he didn’t resist.

Will was right about the burns. Ignoring the grossly warm feeling he got in his stomach from holding onto Will’s hands, he studied them. They were worse than Nico would have ever imagined—most of them second-degree.

"Will, these are awful!" he exclaimed. "How did you even work through the early pain enough to make them this bad?"

Will shrugged. "I don't know. I guess because it's my job. Somebody has to heal everyone who was injured in the battle."

"Yeah, right," Nico scoffed. "And there's totally not an *entire cabin* dedicated to that with at least four or five qualified medics. You were obviously the *only one* suited for the job." He paused and dropped Will's hands. "I mean, sorry. I'm not trying to—don't be mad at me. Just don't overwork yourself."

He was expecting another snarky comment, but Will continued to stare at his hands. "It...it gets so stressful sometimes. Trying to keep track of everyone, training the new healers, checking in with all the patients." He swallowed visibly. "That's—that's why I took that walk last night. I needed some fresh air. I had to get out of my cabin for a little while." Then he glanced up and gave Nico the faintest, most unsure of smiles. "And I'm glad I did."

Nico didn't even want to consider what *that* could possibly mean. There was an awkward silence as they both sort of just stared at each other for a moment, neither quite sure what to say, until Will cleared his throat.

"Uh, so," he said, "you should get some sleep now. I'm sorry for keeping you up so late."

"It's okay," Nico replied, and he realized that he truly meant it. "It was nice to, like, talk about stuff."

That got Nico the grin he was looking for. "See? Told you so, Death Boy."

He didn't even bother correcting Will on the nickname—just crawled past him and down the ladder. Once they were both safely inside and on the floor, Will smiled more softly at him.

"This was great, Nico. Thank you."

"No problem."

"Great. I'm going to head back to my cabin, then."

"Okay."

Will made his way toward the door, but just as he reached for the handle, a thought occurred to Nico.

"Wait!"

Will turned around, hand still on the door. "What?"

"The, uh, patrol harpies," Nico blurted. "They'll eat you if they catch you outside this late."

Will frowned and lowered his arm. "You're right."

“I could...shadow-travel you back to Cabin Seven?”

He seemed to consider this, but then shook his head. “Nah. You’re exhausted; I can tell. I don’t want you to strain your powers when you’ve been recovering so nicely.”

“I guess so,” Nico muttered. “But what...” He trailed off, his eyes landing on Hazel’s empty bed. “You could, uh, stay here?”

Will’s eyes immediately widened. “What?”

Nico pointed to the bed and shrugged, avoiding eye contact.

“Oh,” Will sighed. “Okay. Cool. I’ll stay here, then.” He glanced back and forth between the bed and Nico. “You sure Hazel wouldn’t mind?”

Nico shook his head. “She wouldn’t. She doesn’t stay here much, anyway.”

“Oh.” He made his way over to the bed, sat down tenderly, as if it was made of glass, and took off his shoes. “Well, good night, Nico.” He crawled underneath the covers and pulled them carefully over his shoulders.

Nico tried his best to avoid looking over at him, slipping under his own sheets. He shut off the lamp on his nightstand before curling up with a few pillows. He could feel his eyelids shutting already, heavy with exhaustion.

It was a nice sort of tired, though. There was a strange sort of comfort provided just by the knowledge that someone else was sleeping in the same room as he. Perhaps it was just his drowsiness thinking, but Nico realized then that it felt similar but also very different from the times that Hazel had stayed in that bed.

He exhaled, too lazy to even mentally chastise himself.

“Good night, Will,” he murmured.

Chapter End Notes

I accidentally just mapped out this entire story when I was planning on improvising. Oops. We'll see how it goes and if I stick to my outline (I never do).

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

I'm pretty proud of myself for managing to update this so often. I'd like that pattern to last, but don't get your hopes up...
Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Nico woke up to the birds chirping and the sun streaming through his window.

He groaned and rolled onto his stomach, burying his face in his pillow. Why was it open? He always kept it closed and locked, curtains drawn and tied. He definitely hadn't made any changes last night before going to bed, so why and how...

Memories of the night flooded back to him, and he sat up pin-straight, accidentally flinging his duvet off the bed in the process. He looked over to Hazel's bed, only half expecting to see the son of Apollo—he might have been dreaming.

The bed was empty, but the evidence that Will had actually slept there was clear. It was perfectly made, the sheets and duvet pulled taut and the pillows fluffed. Beforehand, it had been sloppily thrown together and definitely didn't smell like disinfectant.

Not that Nico was smelling the bed—he just wanted to make sure it was clean, you know? He definitely didn't have to restrain himself from crawling into it just to soak up the familiar scent of the camp infirmary.

He shoved those thoughts aside and walked over to his dresser, deciding it would be best to forget about the night before and just move on with his day. Obviously, if Will was in such a hurry to leave, he didn't want anything to do with Nico and didn't want to talk about the little chat they had. Even if that should have relieved him—Nico was definitely not a talk-about-feelings type of person in the morning—he was sort of disappointed, too. He wasn't exactly sure why, and to be honest, he'd rather not know.

So, Will was probably embarrassed, he decided. Will regretted spilling out his secret to the freaking son of Hades and didn't want to see him the next morning. That was okay. It was fine. Right?

Apparently, Nico's self-titled "breakfast buddies" didn't think so.

"Why the long face, Neeks?"

"Shut up, Jason."

Jason pointed at him with his fork, chewing a mouthful of scrambled eggs. “Now, that’s not very polite, young man.”

“Treat the headmaster with respect, young grasshopper,” Percy chimed in.

“What the fuck, guys.”

Jason shrugged. “Hey, if you just told us what’s going on, we wouldn’t have to tease you so much.”

Nico flipped him off and continued picking apart his muffin.

It’s not that he didn’t like talking to Percy and Jason—he did appreciate their efforts to be friendly—he simply didn’t want to discuss certain people with them. Like people who should’ve been sitting across the pavilion at table seven but for some reason were not present.

“Looking for someone?” Jason asked.

“No.”

He raised his hands in surrender. “Alright.” Then he sighed a bit melodramatically. “Hey Percy, you know what I hate?”

Percy frowned. “Getting dumped in the canoe lake? I told you I was sorry about that.”

Jason nodded. “Yes, but that’s not what I’m talking about.” He took another bite of eggs. “Don’t you just hate hypocrites? Like, people that tell you to do something but then don’t do it themselves?”

“Hmm,” Percy said. “Give me an example.”

Jason glanced at Nico but then turned back to Percy. “Well, imagine if you had a friend that is always telling you to eat healthy—”

Nico glared at him. “Jason.”

“—but then they don’t even show up to breakfast.”

“*Jason*.”

Jason continued, somehow managing to keep a straight face. “See what I mean, Percy?”

After a moment, Percy’s eyes widened. “*Oh.*” He turned to Nico. “Hey, maybe if you tell Will that he can sit with us he’ll be here tomorrow morning.”

Was Nico that obvious? He pledged silently to never mention Will in front of his two idiot friends ever again.

On the other hand, Percy and Jason *were* both in successful long-term relationships. Perhaps they could provide some useful advice...

No. He was nowhere near ready for anything like that. In fact, he shouldn't even be thinking about it. Why was he? He was being totally irrational.

"Just shut up," he muttered. He didn't bother telling Percy and Jason that he was mainly addressing himself.

By dinnertime, he still hadn't seen Will anywhere all day.

Nico had peeked into each of the classes the Apollo cabin attended after obtaining a schedule from Annabeth—archery, arts and crafts, music, swordplay—and Will didn't attend any of them. He also never showed at lunch, further angering Nico and Jason as well.

Nico could understand if Will didn't want to be seen with him during the day. But Jason was right about the hypocrisy of the mealtime scenarios—and thirty minutes into dinner, he still hadn't shown his face. Nico was completely losing his appetite with a sudden bout of worry—what if something had happened to him?—when Kayla Knowles approached the Hades table.

"Di Angelo," she stated, as if announcing his name on a roll call. Then she slammed her hands down on the table and leaned over him, a few pieces of green hair falling into her face. "Where the hell have you been all day?" Then she paused and smirked. "No pun intended."

From Nico's other side, Jason laughed. "I like you."

Nico ignored him. "Uh, what do you mean?" To be quite honest, this thirteen-year-old girl was slightly terrifying. He didn't know much else about her, but he was aware that she was the best archer in camp and that he did *not* want to get on her bad side.

She glared at him. "What I *mean* is that my older brother has been moping around the infirmary all day because someone won't pay him a visit like he promised." Jason started chuckling again and Kayla shrugged. "He said to tell you something about a 'friendly face' or something. I don't know. But I recommend getting your ass over there as soon as possible. All of his whining is really starting to interfere with his work."

Nico just stared at her, speechless. Will wanted to see him? All that 'friendly face' stuff...not only did he remember it, he had actually *meant* it?

"Hey." Kayla snapped in his face. "Stop gaping; don't be so surprised." Then her voice lowered a bit. "Will really admires you, you know. And it's not too unbelievable—you're a cool guy, di Angelo."

A cool guy. Will admires you.

After a moment, she cleared her throat. "What are you waiting for? I've got a dinner to get back to."

Finally, Nico stood, brushing off his jeans. "Alright, I'm going." He nodded to Jason. "I'll see you tomorrow, I guess. Say hi to Percy and Annabeth and Piper for me if you see them later."

Jason smiled—too wide and knowing for Nico's liking. “See you tomorrow.”

And with that, Nico stepped into the shadows.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so glad you guys are enjoying this; thanks for all the lovely comments! Again, if you caught any mistakes--canonical, grammatical, anything--please let me know, as I never feel like proofreading this. Thanks!

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

“Will, I think he’s worried about you.”

“Pfft. Nah.” He spread his arms. “Nothing to worry about here.”

“Will.”

“What? I just told you; I’m fine.”

“Will, you’re a terrible liar.”

Chapter Notes

ya like angst?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Nico stood outside the door to the infirmary and decided to give himself a count of three.

He wasn’t sure why he was so nervous to enter. It’s not like Will was waiting to chop his head off or anything. Still, he couldn’t shake the skeletal butterflies from rising once again in his stomach and couldn’t prevent fidgeting with his skull ring, twisting it around and around until his finger started turning red.

Three, he told himself. Two. One. And then he twisted the doorknob.

“Who’s there?” a familiar voice called over the jingle of a tiny bell. “Come on in!”

Nico closed the door behind him, watching the bell as it slowed to a stop, took a deep breath, and then surveyed his surroundings.

The infirmary looked pretty much the same as when he last left it, except that it had far less patients now. Twenty or so white cots lined the walls (also white), and only about a quarter of them were occupied. Two medics were huddled around one of them—one, a boy Nico recognized as Austin and the other, Will. The entire building was silent except for their hushed voices. From what Nico could see of the sides of their faces, they looked like they were discussing something urgent. Both were frowning and Will had his arms crossed. Nico waited awkwardly by the doorway, not wanting to interrupt their conversation, until Will sighed, ran a hand through his hair, and turned around.

As soon as he saw Nico, his eyes widened for a moment and then a smile grew. “Hey, Nico!” He sounded winded. “Long time, no see.” Nico swallowed. “Kayla told me you needed help.”

Austin remained at the bedside and started uncapping some bottle. Will nodded and made his way over to Nico, glancing at each of the other sleeping patients as he passed them. “That was nice of her.”

“Well, actually, the way she said it wasn’t very nice. She’s kind of intimidating.”

Will chuckled. “That’s Kayla for you.”

“Hey, Will,” Austin called. “Mind if I check out for the night? I’ve got a thing with Lacy.”

Will grinned as he walked over. “Yeah, no problem. Have fun.”

Austin clapped Will on the shoulder as he passed by, heading for the door. “Thanks. I’m sorry I couldn’t help more today; I bet it’s been rough.”

Nico noticed Will’s expression sink as he glanced between him and his brother.

“Nah, it’s, uh...it’s been fine,” he said with an obvious facade of false confidence. He looked at his hands, not making eye contact with either of them. “I’ll be fine.”

“You sure?” Austin asked, hand already on the doorknob. “Will, you don’t have to stay here every night. Chiron told you to make a schedule for us.”

“Yeah, but—”

Austin raised his free hand in surrender. “I get it; I get it—you think you’re best suited for the job. Whatever. See you tomorrow. Bye, Nico.” And with that, he left.

As soon as he was gone, Will turned back to Nico, smile wide again. “Sorry about that. Thirteen-year-olds, am I right?”

“Will, I think he’s worried about you.”

“Pfft. Nah.” He spread his arms. “Nothing to worry about here.”

“Will.”

“What? I just told you; I’m *fine*. ”

“Will, you’re a terrible liar.” Nico didn’t want to press the subject, though, because he had no idea how to proceed if Will actually was to open up about what was going on. “So, uh, what can I do to help in here?”

Will smiled again, appearing to be appreciative of the change of topic. “Oh! Would you rather sweep or check inventory?”

"Um...I don't know. Which one should I do?"

Will chuckled. "I'll teach you how to do the sorting, if you want."

Nico shrugged. "Okay. Sure."

Will then led him over to the medicine cabinet, which was attached to the wall over a desk—a desk that Will made very clear was *his*—and showed him the supply list and how to count and check things off if they had enough. Nico was a little worried that he would make a mistake, but Will assured him that it was easy-peasy. After watching for a few minutes to make sure he could do everything correctly, he grabbed a broom from the storage closet and began sweeping at the other end of the room.

As Nico glanced at him, hard at work, all his energy focused on his task, it occurred to him that maybe he had made some wrong assumptions that morning. Maybe Will hadn't left in such a hurry out of embarrassment or annoyance with him—maybe he simply got called into the infirmary early.

But if he had such an early shift, why was he still here?

"Will," Nico asked, "what time did your shift start today?"

Will glanced up. "Huh? Oh...well, we don't really have official 'shifts.' It's...complicated."

Nico put down the paper he was holding and turned to face him. "What time did you start working, then?"

Will scratched his head. "Uh...six A.M., maybe? I can't remember."

"So you don't keep track at all?"

He stared back at the floor and continued sweeping. "No, not really."

Nico glanced at a clock on the wall. "Will. You've been here for thirteen hours."

Will looked up again, and his eyes were wide. "Thirteen?"

"Yeah." Nico shifted uncomfortably. Angry confrontation was his strong point, but he didn't really want to unleash hell's fury on an overworked medic. "You don't think that's a little much?"

Will sighed and sat down on a nearby cot, resting the broom against the rail at the end. "I don't know." Nico had never heard him sound so despondent. "What else can I do?" He glanced behind him, toward one of the occupied beds, and motioned for Nico to come closer.

He did, and sat on a cot across from Will—the one he had stayed in for his three-day visit, he realized.

"That's Maria," Will said in a hushed voice, motioning over his shoulder. "Daughter of Aphrodite. She's...well..."

“Close to death,” Nico suggested. “I—uh—I can feel that sort of thing. Hades thing.”

Will nodded. “I figured. But, yeah, she’s not doing so great. It started out as the flu, but then she got this fever that just won’t stop—”

“And you’ve been focusing all of your energy on her. And burning your hands.”

Will’s head sunk. “Yeah. But, Nico, that’s my job. I have to heal her.”

“Will...” Nico’s voice trailed off, reluctant to say what he should. He was so sick of being the harbinger of bad news—but was it morally wrong for him to keep important information to himself?

“It’s bad, isn’t it?” Will asked. “She hasn’t got much time left?”

Nico nodded, avoiding his eyes.

Will exhaled. “That’s what I figured.” He began picking at a loose thread in the fabric of the bed. “Well, I’ll...I’ll just have to keep trying my hardest until...until...until the end.” He glanced up. “And then I’ll take a break from my powers, I promise.” He laughs quietly. “I guess it’s pretty hypocritical of me to overwork myself like that, huh?”

Nico managed a small smile. “Yeah.”

After a moment of silence, Will stood, picking up the broom. “Thanks, Nico.”

Nico followed suit. “For what?”

Will nudged his shoulder playfully as he walked past toward the storage closet. “For helping, of course.” When he returned empty-handed, his smile was gone again. “And...for that talk. I probably needed that.”

Nico didn’t know how to respond, so he just nodded and stood awkwardly in the middle of the room.

Will then glanced back at the clock. “Thirteen hours. Huh. Well, I’m still going to stay here tonight. I have to. But you should get going, Nico. Catch the campfire with your friends. They’ll be looking for you.”

Nico shook his head. “They know I’m here. I could stay—”

“No,” Will cut in. “I mean—as your doctor, I want you to get some rest. And I’m aware that the beds here are nowhere near as comfortable as those ones in the Hades cabin.” He paused. “Thanks again for letting me crash there last night. I hope you didn’t mind that I opened the windows—the place felt like it needed some fresh air.”

“It’s fine,” Nico said. “You’re probably right.” Another awkward silence. “Um, I’ll get going, then.”

Will smiled, which reassured Nico a little that he would be fine. Not that he really cared that much, of course. It would just be stupid if the head medic were to—oh, fuck it. He couldn’t

do this anymore. He cared, and he knew it—he cared a lot. Too much, probably.

“Yeah,” Will said. “Uh, good night. See you tomorrow?” It was more of a question than a statement.

Nico nodded, backing up toward the door. “See you tomorrow.”

He took one last glance at Will as he closed the door behind him and swore he saw him crying.

Chapter End Notes

This one was tricky. Let me know how I did. More angst coming soon, by the way--be prepared.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

“So, anyway,” Hedge continued, “I was wondering if you’d do me a favor.”

Nico waited for him to explain. If there was one thing he learned from Percy, it was to never say yes until you had all the specifics.

“I’d like to take Mellie out tonight,” he said, “but we can’t leave Chuck. So would you mind babysitting for a little while?”

Nico just stared at him. Babysit?

Chapter Notes

Fun fact: This chapter is exactly 1,000 words, which is my minimum limit for chapter length. I’m not feeling so great today--damn stomach cramps--but I wanted to post something. Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Nico seriously needed to hang one of those “do not disturb” signs outside his cabin. He was sick and tired of waking every morning to the sound of someone beating his door down.

“Jason, I’m going to move to Camp Jupiter if you keep this—oh. Hi, Coach.”

Coach Hedge grinned. Baby Chuck was in his arms, taking in the Hades cabin with wide eyes. Nico prayed to the gods that the daunting skull over the entryway wouldn’t scare him, but it seemed more amusing to the little satyr than anything.

“Hey there, di Angelo,” Hedge greeted. “How’s it been? Not still all shadowy, I hope?”

Nico nodded. “I’m solid now.”

Hedge sighed. “Oh, good. That’s a relief. I was worried about you, kid, but then I saw that that Solace guy was taking care of you in the infirmary. He’s a great kid.”

Nico hoped his face wasn’t too red. “Yeah, I guess.”

“So, anyway,” Hedge continued, “I was wondering if you’d do me a favor.”

Nico waited for him to explain. If there was one thing he learned from Percy, it was to never say yes until you had *all* the specifics.

“I’d like to take Mellie out tonight,” he said, “but we can’t leave Chuck. So would you mind babysitting for a little while?”

Nico just stared at him. *Babysit?*

“He’s real easy—if he starts crying, just give him his bottle or read to him or do that peek-a-boo thing. He likes that.” Hedge chuckled, tickling his son’s cheek, which gained him a little laugh. “We’ll only be gone for three hours max, so he shouldn’t need a diaper change. You can put him to bed around seven.” He looked back to Nico. “Twenty bucks—or drachmas, whatever you want. You in?”

Nico glanced back and forth between Hedge and Chuck. He really should—Coach was always so nice to him and had saved his life on multiple occasions—but Chuck was so...tiny. Fragile. Helpless. Not the sort of thing to be looked after by a son of the death god.

Hedge interrupted his thoughts. “You’re nervous; I get it. Maybe you could find a friend to help you out, you know, somebody with experience. But I trust you, di Angelo, and I’d like you to be the one to watch him.”

Nico swallowed nervously. “Can I...think about it? I just have to make sure I’m...ready.”

Hedge nodded with a smile. “Of course. Just let me know before six.”

“Okay. I will.”

“See you later, champ.”

“Coach Hedge asked me to babysit.”

Will barked out a laugh as he washed his hands. “Did he?” He paused his motion for a moment and then turned to face Nico. “I mean, that’s great. I bet you’ll be great at it. I just... didn’t know you two were close.”

Nico shrugged. “We’re not, really, but...maybe he thinks so?” He shook his head. “I don’t know. Maybe we are, and I just don’t know it.”

Will smiled. “I wouldn’t put it past you.”

Nico considered glaring at him, but just cleared his throat instead. “So, uh, I’m not sure if I should do it.”

Will frowned, pulling latex gloves from the cabinet above them. “Why?”

“Will, look at me. I radiate death.”

“And?”

He raised an eyebrow. “You don’t think that it’s a bad idea for me to be around a *baby*?”

“I think you’d be great.” Will started to walk back toward one of his patients, but Nico caught his arm. The movement was so sudden—even Nico didn’t really see it coming—that he sort of just stood there for a moment, grip tight and eyes on the floor.

Will turned around slowly. “... Yes?”

Nico refused to look up. “Coach, uh, said I could do it with someone else,” he muttered.

Will raised his free hand to his ear. “What was that, di Angelo? I can’t hear you.”

He cleared his throat. “Coach said I could get someone else to help me.” Then he dropped Will’s arm like it was infected—which was a bad comparison, because the infected arms were the ones Will *liked* to grab—and took a step back. “Uh, you don’t have to, though. If you don’t want to. I just thought it might be...I don’t know.”

A distraction, he finished in his head. He gazed around the infirmary until his eyes landed on a sleeping patient—Maria, the daughter of Aphrodite. The one who was dying. The one whose illness he could feel all the way from his cabin at night. The one who Will refused to let alone for more than a half hour, even with another healer. Even though he knew there was nothing he could do.

A distraction. That’s what he needed.

Will hummed. “It could be fun.”

Nico glanced up at him. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.” Will smiled, and Nico realized that his idea just might work. “So...when are we doing this?”

Nico resisted a sudden urge to break into a grin. “Uh, six. Tonight.”

Will’s eyes widened. “Tonight?” He glanced behind him, and Nico immediately caught on. It was no less than he expected.

“Will,” he said, lowering his voice. “You can’t keep worrying about her, okay? When...um, it ends...I’ll make sure my father makes the right judgement.”

“She’ll go to Elysium?” His voice cracked mid-sentence, and he coughed. “You’re...sure?”

Nico nodded. “I’m sure.”

For a moment, Will almost looked like he was going to fall forward, and Nico wondered if he would have to catch him—but then he straightened up and cleared his throat. “Alright. Tonight, six o’ clock. I’ll meet you at your cabin?”

“Yeah. I’ll see you then.”

Will gave a brief smile—one that looked slightly, unpleasantly different, Nico noticed—and then retreated back toward where one of his sisters was bandaging someone’s arm. After one last quick glance between him and Maria’s still form, Nico backed out of the infirmary. He had a satyr to find.

Chapter End Notes

Will this daily updating continue? Who knows. It's going to be a little trickier this week, but I'll try, because it makes me feel accomplished.

This Nico-babysitting-Chuck thing has always been a beloved headcanon of mine and a fic idea that has been sitting in my notes for months, so I figured why not incorporate it?

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Sorry this is so late, short, and kind of crap. But, hey, we passed 10k.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

True to his word, Will showed up on Nico's doorstep five minutes before six—carrying a green and white tote bag over his shoulder.

“What’s in the purse, Solace?”

Will grinned. “Books! I remember Hedge always read to Chuck to quiet him down when they were in the infirmary. I got these from the Athena cabin—have you seen their library?”

Nico shook his head. “I’m not much of a reader.”

“Most of us aren’t, with the dyslexia and everything. But I think it’s fun once in a while. Anyway, I’ve also got some video games in here in case he falls asleep and we get bored.”

“Really? I didn’t think of you as a gamer.”

Will raised an eyebrow. “You’ve got a lot to learn, then, di Angelo.” He peered into the bag. “Oh. And I also brought a first aid kit.”

“Now, *there’s* the Will Solace I know.”

“Ha-ha. Safety first, Nico.” He slung the tote back over his shoulder. “Should we go pick up the baby and then come back here?”

Nico nodded, stepping out of his cabin and closing the door behind him. “Yeah, sure.”

The walk over to the Big House was a little awkward. Will tried to start a conversation about the weather, but it wasn’t anything out of the ordinary and Nico just nodded along, so it didn’t take very long to dissipate. Will also seemed a bit more reserved than usual, and Nico had a nagging feeling that this had to do with a certain patient’s condition back at the infirmary. He felt tempted to ask Will how she was doing—even though he could still feel the life seeping out of her and knew the answer to that question—but he couldn’t decide whether or not he would want to discuss that.

There was also the issue of Nico repeatedly glancing at Will’s hand as it swung back and forth along with his pace. One part of his brain was telling him to grab it and hold it and comfort him, but the rational part told the other half to shut up.

When they reached the steps of the Big House, Nico knocked on the door, and Hedge immediately opened it, Chuck cradled in his free arm and an untied bowtie around his neck. It was a strange sight, Hedge in formal attire, considering Nico had never seen him wear anything other than sports jerseys.

“Hey, di Angelo!” He stepped out and closed the door behind him. “Oh, hey there, Solace.”

Will smiled and nodded politely. “Hi, Coach. How’s the little guy doing?”

Hedge grinned at his baby and then back at Will. “Great, thanks. So...you’re helping di Angelo tonight?”

“Yep. I hope you don’t mind—”

Hedge shook his head rapidly. “Oh, no. Not at all, kid. It’s just what I expected.”

Nico wanted to ask what in *Hades* that was supposed to mean, but then Hedge leaned forward, and he didn’t know what to do, and he sort of panicked.

“I, uh, don’t know how to hold a baby,” he blurted.

Hedge didn’t back away. “It’s not hard, kid. Just hold him like you’re holding laundry or something. He’s not gonna squirm away or anything.”

“I...don’t think I can.” He folded his arms and took a step back.

Hedge huffed. “Sure you can. Solace, hold his arms out.”

Will happily obliged, grabbing Nico’s wrists and pulling them forward. Nico tried to resist, but he was much stronger than he looked.

“Fine, fine,” he muttered. “I’ll try. Just let go of me, Solace.”

Will took a step back and Hedge came forward, gently lowering the baby satyr into Nico’s arms. Once he was properly positioned, he backed toward the door, adjusting the cuffs of his white dress shirt.

The first thing Nico noticed was that Chuck was warm—a comfortable sort of warm. And heavy—heavier than he expected. He had also expected crying, kicking, and screaming—none of which happened as he cradled him in his arms. He held on tightly, but not too tight; he didn’t want to crush him. It felt sort of like holding a glass vase, if glass vases had big brown eyes that stared up at you and blinked slowly.

“Aw,” Will cooed. “I think he likes you.”

Nico stared down at him. “Babies don’t like me, Solace.”

“I think he’s right,” Hedge said, chuckling. “I’m gonna head back in. Are you two set for the night?”

"Yeah," Nico said, eyes still on Chuck. He was moving his head back and forth, taking in all his surroundings, his tiny mouth slightly open but not making any sound.

"You'll be at Cabin Thirteen?"

"Yeah."

"Alright, kid. I'll see you then." Hedge then retreated back into the Big House, fidgeting with his bowtie.

Nico realized that he was still staring down at the baby when Will cleared his throat.

"Uh, let's go back to my cabin," he said quickly. As they began walking, he noticed Will's sly grin. "Shut up, Solace."

He just kept smiling. "Didn't say anything."

All three were silent for the rest of the short walk, and when they reached the Hades cabin door, Will nodded and pointed toward the baby.

"What?" Nico asked.

Will put a finger to his lips and nodded in his direction again, and Nico glanced down.

Chuck's eyes were closed, and a soft smile graced his chubby features.

"He's asleep?" Nico whispered.

Will smiled and nodded.

"What do we do?"

He grabbed the doorknob and turned it slowly, succeeding in not making a sound. "Let's put him to bed."

Nico stepped through and watched as Will closed the door behind them. "Where?"

Will shrugged. "I don't know, Hazel's?"

That sounded fine to him, so he tiptoed over to his sister's bed and gently let Chuck out of his arms, bending over awkwardly for a moment as he removed a tiny finger from unrelentingly curling around his own. After making sure he was stable, he grabbed a folded fleece blanket from the other end and placed it over him, praying to all the gods that it wouldn't disturb his sleep.

Then he rose again and faced Will. "What now?" he hissed.

Will's expression was irritatingly weird—it wasn't his usual grin or smirk, but rather more of a peaceful half-smile. For some reason, it made Nico feel queasy.

“We enjoy it while it lasts,” Will finally said after what felt like too long. “I’ll hook up my Xbox.”

Chapter End Notes

I took the SAT2 today and I've been studying all week and I've also had bad headaches and stomach cramps. There are my excuses. I'm really enjoying writing this, though, and hopefully I'll get a new chapter out tomorrow (or even tonight, we'll see).

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Will yawned, stretching his arms out in front of him and cracking his knuckles. “All this gaming is exhausting. What do you say we watch a movie instead?”

“You’re just mad that you haven’t won anything,” Nico replied, to which he received a sharp elbow in the ribs. “Ow! Fine, sure. But I don’t have any.”

Chapter Notes

This one's also not my best; sorry. I'm more excited to write the next few and I kind of rushed it. Nevertheless, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Damn it, Nico; how are you so good at this game?” Will asked for the tenth time that night.

Nico just smirked and shrugged. Will had seriously underestimated what seventy years in a casino arcade could do to a ten-year-old kid, and in return, he was getting his ass kicked in every single video game he owned.

Wondering if the sound he just heard was real or just his anxious brain hallucinating, he then glanced over his shoulder to ensure that Chuck was still asleep. He smiled and returned his attention to the TV screen after seeing him lying in the bed, breathing slowly underneath the blanket.

He had no idea that babysitting could be so easy yet so stress-inducing at the same time.

Will yawned, stretching his arms out in front of him and cracking his knuckles. “All this gaming is exhausting. What do you say we watch a movie instead?”

“You’re just mad that you haven’t won anything,” Nico replied, to which he received a sharp elbow in the ribs. “Ow! Fine, sure. But I don’t have any.”

Will smiled. “I figured as much—I brought a couple.” He reached down off the bed they were sitting on—*Nico’s* bed, which made his heart beat in strange ways—and pulled a small stack of DVD cases from his bag. Nico hadn’t had too much experience with modern technology yet (besides video games), but Frank had introduced him and Hazel to those.

“You okay with Frozen?” Will asked.

Nico glanced at him. He was holding out one of the DVDs, one that he didn't recognize.
"Never heard of it, but sure."

Will's jaw hung open. "You've never seen Frozen?"

Nico shrugged. "No. Why?"

Will just shook his head in disbelief, stood, and crouched down by the DVD player underneath Nico's TV.

Nico prayed that it would work. He was grateful for all the stuff his dad had bought him—being the god of wealth and all—but it was pretty...unreliable sometimes. After a moment, though, Will stood and the movie started playing.

"You're gonna love this; I just know it," he said, rejoining Nico on the bed. It was turned sideways, so they had a lot of room and they weren't laying down, but they were sitting close enough that Will's thermometer would have read Nico's internal temperature to be a little higher than ninety-eight point six.

It wasn't that Will himself made him uncomfortable—Nico was actually starting to feel less awkward and more normal around him as of late. He just hadn't quite surpassed the whole touch-aversion thing. He accepted the occasional hug from Jason, and he was used to Percy's daily fist bumps by now, but anything more with anyone else (besides Hazel, of course) still made him queasy and sweaty—and who would want to touch a guy like that, anyway? It was better that he kept his distance.

Will's shoulder taps were definitely still new territory, and so Nico sort of jumped, pried from his thoughts.

"Gods, Will, you...uh, kind of scared me." He realized after a beat that he might not be fully understood. "I mean, I'm just kind of jumpy." He trailed off into a mumble. "I don't know."

When he glanced up, Will actually looked a little guilty. "Sorry. I just noticed that you weren't really paying attention. What's up?"

"Nothing," he automatically replied, and then, for some reason, the memory of Jason advising him to actually talk about *what's up* resurfaced in his brain. "I was just, uh, thinking," he added. There. That should be enough, right?

But Will leaned forward, resting his elbow on his knee and his chin on his hand. "About what?"

"Nothing." Damn it. "Nothing important."

Will stared at him for a moment longer, and Nico had to avoid eye contact out of sheer embarrassment—he was never listening to Jason's advice again—but soon enough, he shrugged, gave a quick "okay," and then went back to watching the movie. Strangely, Nico almost felt disappointed. He was so used to Will's regular routine of attempting to coax the

truth out of him and resorting to forceful bickering when he refused to respond, and his immediate resignation seemed odd and out of place.

Then it hit Nico. *Maria*. This was supposed to be the distraction, but he was still thinking about her. It wasn't good enough. He needed to do more, try harder.

"Hey, that redhead princess kind of reminds me of you."

Will turned to him and raised an eyebrow for a few seconds before breaking into a smile.
"Then you're totally Elsa."

"I guess I can kind of see it."

Hedge showed up a few minutes after the movie finished, just after they moved to sit at Chuck's bedside. Will was checking his vitals—

"Is that really necessary?"

"Shut up, Death Boy. It's a nervous habit."

—when Nico opened the door for him.

He was still wearing his formal clothes, this time with the bow tie fully knotted, with the addition of a fleece Yankees jacket. He grinned widely when he saw them, and Nico hoped that meant his night out had gone well—he had little interest in dealing with a coach in a bad mood.

"Hey, kids! How'd it go? Where's my little guy?"

Nico quickly put a finger to his lips and Will whirled around from his place on the bed, doing the same.

"Oh," Hedge whispered, looking a little embarrassed. "I keep forgetting about the sleeping thing. It's hard to remember to stay quiet." Then he approached the bed and Will handed Chuck over. "Thanks for watching him, you two."

Will smiled politely. "It was no problem."

Hedge shifted the sleeping baby to one arm and shoved his free hand into his back pocket. "Here's, uh—here's a little something for ya, Nico. It's not much, but I really appreciate you helping me out." He held out a small wad of cash, but Nico took a step back.

"I, uh, don't need it. I'm okay."

Hedge gave him a pointed look. "Take it, kid. You did a good job."

Nico glanced back at Will, who nodded encouragingly, and then, only because Hedge was starting to look really scary, carefully took the money.

"Good," Hedge said. "Well, I'll see you kids around, then. Have a good night."

"Good night, Coach," Will replied. "And tell Chuck good night from me if he ever wakes up."

Hedge chuckled. "Will do." Then he headed back out the door, and the cabin fell silent.

Nico glanced down at the cash in his hands—it was a generous amount, more than he would have ever expected from babysitting. Hell, he didn't even know it was customary to pay people for stuff like that. *Was* it customary? He wasn't sure.

Then he glanced at Will, who was still sitting on Hazel's bed, inspecting his fingernails.

Nico counted out half of the cash, cleared his throat, and held it out in front of him.

Will raised his head, and his gaze darted between the money and Nico. "No. It's yours."

"You can have it."

"I don't want it."

"But you helped me."

"Keep it."

"You should get half."

"I said I don't want it," he repeated. "I don't even have a use for it."

"What do you mean?"

He shrugged. "I've got everything I need from the camp store, and it's not like I can go anywhere else."

"What?"

"Not all of us can shadow-travel, Mr. Son of Hades."

"Oh."

"But I'd like to get out of here for a day sometime," he added. "It could be fun. A little trip into the city." He grinned. "How about that? If you're so insistent on giving me that money, then take me to the city."

"What?"

Will poked his arm, and it felt like a static shock, which was weird, because that was supposed to be Jason's thing. "You can shadow-travel. I can't. So you should take me to the city."

Nico swallowed. Plans like that caused far more anxiety for him than Will probably realized. “When?” he asked.

Will shrugged. “I don’t know. Sometime soon, while it’s still nice and warm out.” He paused, and Nico watched as his eyes widened and his smile fell. “If you want to, of course. I mean, we don’t have to.”

Nico was about to agree, to say no to the whole thing, but...

He glanced at the money in his hand, but then, more importantly, at the guy in front of him. “No. We should. I owe you one.”

For more than just the babysitting, he wanted to add.

Will grinned again—thankfully, because Nico always felt panicky when he frowned for some reason—and then stood from the bed. “Great! Thanks, Nico. I’ll see you tomorrow?”

Nico nodded, his mind once again reminding him about the patient sleeping in the infirmary, and how when Will would go to check her vitals, they wouldn’t be as reassuring as Chuck’s. “Tomorrow. Yeah.”

“Good.” Will headed for the door, Nico watching him go, but he paused just as he was pushing it open. “Thanks for tonight, by the way.”

“What?”

He didn’t turn around, and his voice sounded smaller. “It was fun. I mean it.”

And just like that, he was gone.

Chapter End Notes

What do you call Elsa when she secludes herself in her own castle?

ICE-olated!

(haha I'm so funny right?)

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

“Speaking of Will,” Jason continued—Nico wanted to add that they were not speaking of Will—“he’s the reason I got held up this morning. I passed by the Big House, and he was there, just sitting on the steps.” He paused to swallow. “He didn’t look so great, so I got closer, and then I noticed he was all pale and had bags under his eyes. Looked like he hadn’t slept in a week—seriously. So I asked him if he was alright, and why he wasn’t at breakfast, and he didn’t say much except that he was ‘fine’ and ‘not hungry.’ I don’t know how much of that I believe, though.” He then looked pointedly at Nico. “He also said not to tell you any of this.”

Chapter Notes

This is a long one; enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Jason was late to breakfast.

“Where is he?” Nico grumbled, poking at his pancakes. “After everything he said the other day about hypocrites...”

Percy stuffed his face with a piece of bacon .”Probably on his morning jog.” Then he grinned. “One might say he’s *running* a little late.”

Luckily, Nico wasn’t chewing anything, otherwise he probably would have spit it out. “First of all, stop. Second of all, especially not with your mouth full. And third—*morning jog*? ”

Percy nodded. “Yeah. Does it every day.”

“And how have I never been aware of this?”

“Dunno,” Percy replied with a shrug. “It’s been a thing since he came back from that first quest with Leo and Piper, he told me. I guess it was a routine he had back at Camp Jupiter.” He finally swallowed. “You’ll have to ask him.”

“I certainly will.”

Seconds later, he spotted a figure in purple running up to the dining pavilion from the Big House. After a moment of staring, Jason finally noticed his glare, ignored his frown, and waved with a cheery grin. When he eventually arrived and sat down at the Hades table, he

looked like he hadn't even broken a sweat, which at least sort of justified Nico's oblivion to his morning ritual.

"Sorry I'm late," he exhaled all in one breath, plopping down next to Percy and immediately picking up his fork and digging into the meal they had brought over for him. "I guess you could say I *ran* a bit behind schedule."

Percy frowned. "Hey, I already made that joke."

Nico glared at both of them in turn. "Hey, you two need to *stop*," he mocked. "And Jason, why have you never bothered to tell me you go for a freaking jog every morning? How much of a goody two-shoes are you?"

He shrugged. "It was a Roman thing."

Percy pointed at Nico with his fork, chewing yet another mouthful of bacon. "Told you."

"Percy, you're going to choke on your food. Stop trying to talk."

Jason grinned. "Yeah, Percy, then Nico would have to take you down to the *infirmary*. How awful would that be? Right, Nico?"

Nico didn't even have the motivation to muster up a nice death glare, so he instead closed his eyes and let his forehead clunk against the table. "Shut up. I don't know what your problem is."

"Speaking of Will," Jason continued—Nico wanted to add that they were *not* speaking of Will—"he's the reason I got held up this morning. I passed by the Big House, and he was there, just sitting on the steps." He paused to swallow. "He didn't look so great, so I got closer, and then I noticed he was all pale and had bags under his eyes. Looked like he hadn't slept in a week—seriously. So I asked him if he was alright, and why he wasn't at breakfast, and he didn't say much except that he was 'fine' and 'not hungry.' I don't know how much of that I believe, though." He then looked pointedly at Nico. "He also said not to tell you any of this."

Nico suddenly lost all appetite for his pancakes, and he set his fork down on the table. "Well, he's not going to trust you anymore, then." His heart wasn't in the joke, though—it was currently beating a mile a minute, his brain buzzing with possibilities of what could be wrong.

And then he remembered Maria.

Mustering the powers of the Underworld, he reached out with his death-radar and located her in a matter of seconds. It didn't take long because her life force had already been sapped to such a great extent. It felt like witnessing a room slowly being drained of clean air and pumped with poison gas.

Sometimes Nico hated his powers.

"Dude, what are you staring at?"

Nico shook himself and glanced up. Percy was looking at him funny, and Jason was frowning around his breakfast.

“Nothing.”

Jason raised an eyebrow. “Then what were you thinking about?”

Nico tried to shrug it off, but they both still stared at him with skepticism.

“Look,” Percy said, “if you want to go see what’s up with Will, that’s fine. You’re excused from the table.” Then Jason kicked him not-so-discreetly underneath the table. “Ow! What was that for?”

“Percy, you have no *tact*,” he hissed.

Nico stood, brushing off his hands. “I’ll go if I want to, thank you very much. And I don’t need to be *excused*. You’re not my parents.”

Apparently someone from Athena overhead his comment, because there was a quick reply of “I’m not so sure about that” from table six. Nico happily ignored this and strolled out of the pavilion.

Once he was out of everyone’s lines of sight, he broke into a run. No point in wasting time, right?

And if something was wrong with Will...

He didn’t want to let himself think about it, because it scared him for more than one reason.

As he approached the Big House, he saw him. A figure in green scrubs crouched on the front steps, head buried in his arms, which were trembling, and something was dripping behind them, and his head was shaking, too, and—

Nico froze. How was he supposed to do this? He had never dealt with someone crying before. And this was Will. Would he even want him there, or would he rather be alone? Would he need Nico to get him a tissue or hug him or something? Were they close enough for something like that? Were they even friends?

He just stood there, a good ten feet away, for about thirty seconds. And then he cleared his throat in a moment of bravery and instantly regretted it when Will’s head jerked up.

His eyes were bloodshot, the skin underneath them red, swollen, and wet. He had moved his hands, too, and Nico caught a glimpse of their new burns, some of which were starting to blister.

Upon noticing him, Will immediately rose to his feet and began furiously wiping at his eyes with the collar of his scrubs, the material of which did not absorb liquids particularly well.

“Sorry,” he croaked, his voice raw. “I, uh...I have to go.”

“Wait.”

Will stopped, but Nico had no idea what to say next. “Um...you don’t have to. Can’t you, like, take a break?”

“Nico, you can’t take a break from trying to save someone’s life.”

Nico didn’t respond, but Will didn’t move.

Eventually, he sighed and sat down again. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t snap like that. And I’m technically already on a break right now, which is why I feel so awful.”

Nico took a cautious step forward. “If it’s making you feel awful, then why don’t you get back in there?”

Will chuckled humorlessly. “They kicked me out.” He held his hands up. “Look at them—all burned again.”

“I did tell you to stop overworking yourself.”

Will sighed, still attempting to wipe the tears off his cheeks. “Yeah, you did.” He paused. “I’m sorry you have to see me like this. I’m just—”

“Will,” Nico interrupted, still having no idea what the hell he was doing. “It’s fine.”

Will smiled half-heartedly, staring at the ground. “Thanks.” He then gestured to the area next to him. “You can sit down if you want. I don’t bite, usually.”

“I think I’m the scary one, Solace,” he replied, though he obliged.

Once he was sitting, Will spoke up again. “Can you...can you tell how much time she has left?”

Nico shook his head. “Not precisely. I can sort of just feel how much *life* she has left. But there isn’t any sort of unit conversion factor.”

Will sniffled. “Nerd.”

“What?”

“I said you’re a nerd.”

“Well, thanks, Solace. Or should I say *guy who owns over thirty Xbox games and knows all the lyrics to Frozen.*”

“Nothing wrong with that.”

“Never said there was.”

They sat in an oddly comfortable silence for a few moments, and Nico was extraordinarily grateful for the lightened mood. If there was one thing he both admired and hated about Will,

it was his natural cheerfulness. But there was a lot more than just one thing.

After a little while, Nico coughed. “Um, do you want to, like...” He trailed off, realizing that he had no clue how to put into a coherent, appropriate sentence what he wanted to ask, but Will was already staring at him, waiting for him to continue. “Maybe come sit on my cabin roof again?” he finished, the words all seeming to jumble together.

Will somehow managed to hear and process them, though, and he nodded. “I’d love to. Ten o’clock?”

“Yeah. Sure,” Nico replied. “I’ll, uh, see you then. Don’t be late,” he added, but then he felt stupid. “I mean, it’s okay if you are. That was a joke. A stupid joke, I’m sorry.”

Will just grinned. “It’s okay. I like your stupid jokes.”

Nico’s heart rate increased so rapidly that he wondered if he was about to collapse on the spot. He hoped Will’s healing powers didn’t extend to sensing patients’ pulses without touch.

He stood, then, and Nico managed a shaky exhale. “I’m going to head back to my cabin, I think. Maybe try to get some sleep.”

The way he said *try* didn’t make Nico feel any less wary, but he nodded. “Okay. Uh, good luck?”

Will smiled again at him as he retreated down the steps and began heading across the green. “I’ll need it. See you later, Nico.”

Nico couldn’t help staring as he walked away.

Chapter End Notes

This one was a lot more enjoyable and easy to write. I hope you guys liked it as well. I’ll try to get another out by tomorrow night, but we’ll see. It’s gonna be a good one, and I want to get it right.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

“Who’s there?”

It was a small voice. A small, cracked voice that Nico wished he didn’t recognize so easily.

His mind wanted to run back to the safe bubble of his cabin and never come out, but his legs, seemingly by their own will, stepped forward.

Nico had never wavered in the face of a monster. Kronos? He had stood his ground. Akhyls in Tartarus? Nothing more than an inconvenience compared to this. Because, here, now, for the first time in his life, Nico’s knees were trembling.

Chapter Notes

I hope y’all like this one; I worked on it for a while. Let me know in the comments!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was ten-thirty when Nico started getting nervous.

Yeah, it was very likely that Will didn’t want to hang out with him, but he was not the kind of person to revoke a plan...at least Nico didn’t think so. And he had seemed so sincere earlier.

But maybe he misinterpreted the signals he had received.

Still, his anxious mind couldn’t help wandering to some less-realistic but certainly more frightening scenarios. What if Will was hurt or lost or kidnapped or something? What if he’d been attacked by harpies on his way over? Those rapacious old chicken ladies had no remorse whatsoever. They probably found him because the idiot didn’t bother wearing black or covering his stupid blond hair again. But it was also Nico’s fault, because he was the one who had asked Will to sneak out this late in the first place.

This late. Another possibility flashed through his mind.

What time did you start working?

I can’t remember.

You've been here for thirteen hours.

That's my job.

After one last glance toward the Apollo cabin, Nico slipped into the shadows.

The infirmary was so dark that even after he checked to ensure his feet were on solid ground, he still briefly wondered if he had at last become stuck forever in some sort of shadow realm.

But then he heard a sound—a muffled sort of whimpering that was almost inaudible but definitely human. He stretched his arms out, attempting to get a feel for his surroundings, and stepped forward when he didn't feel anything. After a few slow, shuffled paces, his hands hit a wall—wait, no, that part wasn't a wall. His right hand was on a doorknob.

He turned it and pushed. It creaked open, revealing a room that was actually visible. Moonlight poured in through the windows lining the far wall and reflected off the row of identical white cots.

He glanced behind him to see where he had landed, and with the new light source, he found that his shadow-travel had dropped him off in the supply closet. Damn, his skills were getting rusty—all Will's fault for limiting his practice time.

He moved to close the door behind him, but it slipped from his fingers and slammed much louder than he intended. Immediately following the echo of the bang through the silence was a short sniffle and another quiet whimper.

Nico froze. Why was he here? What strange bout of bravery must have occurred for him to have made such a rash, stupid, *ridiculous* decision? Someone was here. Someone was most likely *crying* and in some kind of *pain* and he had no fucking clue how to deal with something like that—

“Who’s there?”

It was a small voice. A small, cracked voice that Nico wished he didn’t recognize so easily.

His mind wanted to run back to the safe bubble of his cabin and never come out, but his legs, seemingly by their own will, stepped forward.

Nico had never wavered in the face of a monster. Kronos? He had stood his ground. Akhyls in Tartarus? Nothing more than an inconvenience compared to this. Because, here, now, for the first time in his life, Nico’s knees were trembling.

“Who’s there?” Louder this time, but still barely audible.

He realized that he couldn’t just stand there any longer. He had come here to find Will and see if he was okay, and damn him if he was going to, for once in his life, back down from something that scared him.

He admires you, you know. He played the memory over and over again in his head, trying to find some truth in the words. If Kayla was wrong or lying, he wouldn't be surprised, but if she was right...

"It's me," he said.

A soft shuffling sound. "Nico?" The voice was louder.

"Yeah. Uh, it's me."

He then heard footsteps, and then suddenly he was right in front of him.

"Nico, what are you doing here?"

It wasn't so much of an accusation as it sounded like confused curiosity, but Nico still flinched. "I, uh, just..." He trailed off when his eyes adjusted to Will's shadowed features.

Nico had never seen anyone who shared more resemblance to a zombie. Will's face was white as the bedsheets, almost blue in the moonlight. Just as before, his eyes and cheeks were wet—the light bounced off of them, ironically making them sparkle—and his hands, clutched together over his chest as if he were praying, shivered and looked frail as bare bones.

Never before had Nico witnessed someone look so...broken.

Then he shook his head. "I—I didn't mean it like that." He swallowed when his voice cracked. "I'm sorry I didn't make it to your cabin. We had plans. I'm sorry." He then gestured over his entire body. "And I'm sorry you have to...see me like this. This morning was bad enough, I—"

"Will. Stop it."

Nico really had no idea where he was pulling his words from. It seemed almost instinctual.

Will's eyes shot up. "What?"

"The apologizing. Stop it. You have nothing to be sorry for."

He looked back to the ground. "Oh. Sorry. I mean—sorry. For saying sorry again."

If Will didn't look so utterly desolate, Nico might have smiled. "It's okay," he replied. "But, uh, you're obviously not."

Will sniffed. "I'm fine."

"Don't even try."

He was silent for a moment, and Nico wondered if he shouldn't be pushing him so hard. He knew firsthand what it felt like to not want to talk to anyone—but he also knew how freeing it had been to spill everything that one night, to relieve himself of some of his burden.

"You told me about...the hands," Nico said, trying to soften his voice a little. "Remember? You can tell me stuff, Will. I'm not going to judge you. And I might not really be able to help at all either, but—"

He was cut off when, suddenly, arms were thrown around him and a head was buried in the crook of his neck.

"She's dead, Nico." He could barely make out the words, which were heaved out in between sobs and muffled by his shoulder. He couldn't fully comprehend anything, really, because every panic alarm inside him was buzzing and beeping. "She's *dead*."

And then an autopilot system Nico didn't even know he had took control, slowly raising his arms to Will's back and then pulling them both to the ground to lean against the footboard of a metal bed frame. It was cold and hard and uncomfortable from all angles, but the embrace was just the opposite. Will was clinging to him like a baby sloth to its mother, and yet he couldn't seem to mind.

This was different from his hug awkward with Jason. It was different from his casual hugs with Hazel. It was even different from the hug with Reyna, which had been quickly categorized as one of the happiest moments of his short, miserable life. This was a hug with Will—a fragile, vulnerable Will. Nico felt that if he squeezed too hard, he would shatter like glass. He also wanted to keep holding on, however, and act as a shield around him, blocking out any incoming harm. Never before had he felt such a strong urge to *protect* someone.

Perhaps he was going a little insane. But being so close to this stupid, reckless, and goddamn hypocritical son of Apollo felt so *right*.

So he stayed. He stayed, and he didn't need to say anything when he wasn't good at that, because he realized then that sometimes actions really do speak louder than words.

He stayed with his arms around the boy who was making him feel quite a few emotions that he had never before experienced. He stayed and let Will cry and cry and cry some more until, eventually, he took a few shaky breaths and began to talk again.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this one took a while--I'm on vacation in NYC right now and seeing Hamilton in exactly one hour and twenty-five minutes! There most likely won't be another chapter until at least Thursday night, so I hope you all enjoyed this one.

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

“She said, after she realized she probably wasn’t going to make it, that she wished she could have a second chance.”

“And she will,” Nico replied. “She will. I promise.”

“Promise,” Will repeated. “You’ve—you’ve kept every promise you’ve ever made.” And then he fell back into Nico’s shoulder again, and Nico felt that his eyes were still wet. “I wish I could do the same. Every patient, every kid on their deathbed...I promise them that they’ll be okay. But so many of them aren’t.”

Chapter Notes

This is a long one, and probably my favorite yet. Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“I’m sure you felt her death earlier. It was sometime around noon.”

Nico nodded but kept silent. Now that he really thought about it, he remembered that his sense of Maria’s life force had seemed a little different since then. She had been so close to death this whole time, though, that instead of an electrical shock or a punch in the gut, it felt more like a barely-trickling faucet had finally been turned off—unnoticed until he tried listening for it.

“We were all here for the last hour—Austin, Kayla, and I. Not the younger kids; I don’t want them to have to go through something like this.” He almost choked on that sentence. “Not yet.” He cleared his throat. “And then one of them called Chiron to come in, and he and some nymph carried her body away, and I—I yelled at them. Austin and Kay. They asked if I wanted them to stay, and I just yelled at them to go away. I wanted to say I was sorry, but it was too late. Now they’re probably blaming themselves and thinking I’m mad at them or something.”

“They’ll be fine,” Nico replied. “I saw them at lunch. They seemed okay.” Truth was, they had looked a bit shaken up, but they were managing to maintain a facade for the younger Apollo campers. “You can apologize later.” He paused. “Uh, not that you need to. It’s not your fault, Will, the stuff you’re going through—”

Will shook his head, tears soaking into Nico's shirt and curls tickling his neck. "No. I should've known to keep myself under control." He took a shaky breath. "I hate when I get like this—all emotional. It's like I'm detached from my own body and trying to maneuver it with a faulty remote."

To say Nico could relate would be an understatement.

"Like someone's prying your hands from your own reigns," he added quietly.

Will nodded. "Exactly. And every time someone dies—*every goddamn time*—this is what happens." He raises one hand from its place on Nico's back, gesturing at his face and then body. "*This.*"

Nico revised his opinion of Will Solace. Perhaps he wasn't the cheerful, confident, in-your-face sort of guy he was thought to be—at least, not always. Maybe sometimes he felt scared and vulnerable and angry at himself for tragedies beyond his control—

Maria. The name echoed through Nico's mind, and then not just his mind, but his entire being, pulsing through him like the pain from a harsh stab with each heartbeat, making his blood run cold and chilling his bones—

And then he saw flashbacks, images of a woman he once knew but could never remember, someone who had held him like this, who had let him cry into her sleeve, even the fancy dresses, who had tucked him into bed and kissed his forehead every single night—

"Nico?" He heard Will's voice, he knew it was his, but it sounded muted and distant. What was one moment now compared to all that he had lost? He had been alive for seventy-odd years now, and how much of that had he been able to spend with his family?

That was what death felt like, he realized. Lost potential. He didn't miss the moments he had already spent with them—he missed what could have been, what *would* have been.

"Nico, are you alright?"

Nico focused back on Will, who had since pulled back a bit and was tugging on his forearms, eyes wide and still stained red.

"Maria will get to Elysium," he said. "And Hades will recommend rebirth. He always does for the ones who die young."

Will gasped for breath, held it for a moment, and then exhaled slowly. "She'll choose it. I know she will. She—" He looked to be on the verge of tears again, but he managed to hold it in. "She said, after she realized she probably wasn't going to make it, that she wished she could have a second chance."

"And she will," Nico replied. "She will. I promise."

"Promise," Will repeated. "You've—you've kept every promise you've ever made." And then he fell back into Nico's shoulder again, and Nico felt that his eyes were still wet. "I wish

I could do the same. Every patient, every kid on their deathbed...I promise them that they'll be okay. But so many of them aren't."

Nico knew there was no proper response to that—his words held so much harsh truth—so he just brought his arms to Will's back and prayed to all the Olympians that he could provide something that held any small resemblance to comfort.

"It's okay," he whispered after a moment. "Even if some of them don't make it...it's okay." He wondered seconds later, when Will still hadn't responded, if that was sufficient.

He remained silent for a short while afterwards, but Nico could feel his breathing, his chest heaving rapidly at first but then gradually slowing to a steady, small pressure against his own every four seconds, and it gave his anxious mind something to focus on, like the rhythmic beat of a band's drum—stable, reliable, and unyielding. A constant in unknown territory.

Finally, after what could've been minutes or hours—he really wasn't sure—Will spoke again, his voice still hushed and cracked but a little less heart-wrenching.

"Thank you."

And for Nico, that was enough.

Nico heard a wolf's howl and blinked his eyes open.

The first thing he registered, of course, was Will—head in his lap, arms around him, curled up in a fetal position. A shakiness from all the crying still rattled his breath, but his face had regained some of its normal complexion—at least from what Nico could make out in the faint moonlight. It wasn't as bright as before, he then realized, and he craned his neck to glance out the window behind them. The moon was much higher in the sky. And his neck was aching—scratch that, his whole spine was. He must have fallen asleep for a few hours.

He stared back down at Will, who looked so goddamn peaceful. How had he, the son of literal death, managed *that*? He must have been so tired that all his mental filters had shut down.

Now he was panicking. Should he leave Will and go back to his cabin? Should he stay? Should he wake him up?

He shifted his weight to one leg, attempting to gently shove Will off of him, but his sleeping form twitched, yawned, and blinked.

"Who is—oh." Suddenly his eyes went wide and his cheeks a darker shade of bluish gray (Nico figured it was probably pink under daylight). "Nico."

Of course. Of course Will would be embarrassed to have woken up here in the infirmary, in the middle of the night, with him.

Nico rose to his knees, not trusting his sore legs to hold him just yet, and backed away.
“Sorry. I’ll go now.”

“No!” Will whisper-shouted. Then he flushed even darker, which gave Nico a strange heart palpitation that he *definitely* wasn’t going to see his doctor about. “I mean, wait. You should—you can stay, if you want to.” Then he cleared his throat and spoke in his usual louder tone. “You let me stay over in your cabin because of the harpies, so I’m going to have to return the favor.”

“This isn’t your cabin.”

Will rose to his knees as well, huffing. “You know what I mean.”

Nico grinned. “I know. I was joking. I’ll...” He swept his gaze around the room, taking in the rows of cots—the one he had stayed in just over two weeks ago, the one that had held Maria hours prior. “I’ll stay.”

Will nodded. “Good.”

Then Nico stood and sort of expected Will to do the same, but he remained in place on the ground, now staring at the floor.

Nico cautiously approached him. “Uh, need a hand?” He reached out tentatively.

Will nodded again, accepted it, and allowed Nico to pull him to his feet. Even after he was stable, he didn’t let their hands drop. Nico noticed that his eyes were fixed on them.

“Thanks.”

Nico looked at them, too. “No problem.”

“No. I mean, for staying.”

“Yeah, uh, no problem.” He hesitated. “And about before we fell asleep—”

“That’s what I mean.”

“Oh.”

Will squeezed his hand a little tighter. “I needed that. I really appreciate it, Nico. Seriously. I think...I think you’re probably the only one of my friends that would’ve done that for me. Because, you know...they don’t take the death stuff as well. And with you, it just...I feel like I can talk about it so easily.”

“Oh.”

He still didn’t let go and still didn’t meet Nico’s eyes. “And not just for staying tonight—staying at camp. Like, not running away like you were planning. I’m really glad you didn’t.”

Nico couldn’t prevent a tiny smile from growing on his face. “Yeah,” he replied quietly. “I’m glad I didn’t, too.” He paused, allowing the feeling of Will’s fingers around his own to fade

from hyper-tense shock to a nervous buzz. “You should know I only stayed for the health care benefits.”

That garnered a laugh, which Nico was surprised didn’t fill the entire dark room with actual sunlight. “Oh, really? I’m honored.” Then Will yawned and brought his hand to his mouth, dropping Nico’s, which left him with a pit of disappointment larger than he’d like to admit. “I’m taking this bed,” he said, gesturing to the one they had been leaning against. “Feel free to use whichever you want, though the ones on this side have fresh sheets.”

“Noted,” Nico replied. He walked toward a bed three away from Will’s and sat down, sliding off his shoes. He left his t-shirt and jeans on—no way was he getting undressed then and there—and was about to slide under the covers when he glanced over at Will, already collapsed, eyes closed and snuggling into his pillow.

He thought of Maria—his mother. He stood and tiptoed over in his socks.

“*Buona notte, tesoro,*” he whispered. The accent which he so rarely used struck him immediately as being so eerily similar to hers, especially when speaking her signature phrase. He then grabbed the ends of the bedsheets and pulled them up, ever so slowly and gently, to his shoulders.

And then he leaned over, hesitated for a moment out of habit, and placed a barely-there wisp of a kiss on his cheek. “Thank you.”

Chapter End Notes

I feel like every other chapter alternates between sarcastic and goofy humor and deep philosophical metaphors. There is no in between.

I loved writing this chapter so much.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

“Oh my gods, Nico. You do realize that I have every right to ground you here for another week right now.”

Nico shrugged his free shoulder. “Try me.”

Will raised his eyebrows and lowered his hands to his hips. “Really? You struggled with three days, you really think you could put up with seven? The only reason I don’t go insane here is my—”

“You are insane, Solace.”

“—own hilarious sense of humor.” He paused. “What did you say?”

Nico’s thoughts had already drifted elsewhere. “Nothing.”

Chapter Notes

The angst is over...for now. Enjoy it while it lasts.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Nico. Nico, wake up, you sleepyhead.”

After cracking one eye open and seeing Will’s cheery morning face—yes, that was a real thing—Nico rolled over, burying his head in his pillow. “No.”

“Come on,” Will whined. “It’s almost eight.”

“Which means it’s still seven, which means it’s almost six, which means it’s too goddamn early, Solace.”

“That’s not how time works, idiot.” When Nico didn’t response, he tugged on his upper arm. “Get out of bed.”

“I’m experiencing some serious *déjà vu* here.”

Will huffed indignantly. “Actually, back when you were still recovering, I let you sleep ’til noon, because I’m nice. But now, this is unacceptable.”

Nico turned slightly to peek at him. “So you admit that I’m fully recovered?”

Will’s face flushed strawberry red. “I did not—” He raised a finger as if he were about to give a lecture but then tossed both hands into the air. “Oh my gods, Nico. You do realize that I have every right to ground you here for another *week* right now.”

Nico shrugged his free shoulder. “Try me.”

Will raised his eyebrows and lowered his hands to his hips. “Really? You struggled with *three* days, you really think you could put up with seven? The only reason I don’t go insane here is my—”

“You *are* insane, Solace.”

“—own hilarious sense of humor.” He paused. “What did you say?”

Nico’s thoughts had already drifted elsewhere. “Nothing.”

I’d like to get out of here for a day sometime. Take me to the city.

Then, finally—by his own decision, of course; Will had nothing to do with it—he sat up in the cot. “Uh, remember that thing you asked me to do?”

Will’s eyes narrowed, though they seemed to be directed at something above Nico’s eye level. “Your hair is a mess. And, uh, what?”

Muttering an Italian curse, Nico rapidly ran a hand over his head, attempting to tame what probably looked like a bird’s nest. “Forget it.”

“Aw,” Will whined, slumping onto an adjacent cot. “C’mon, tell me!”

Nico placed his feet on the ground and pat his front pocket. The money from Hedge was still there. Will was pouting at him—literally sticking out his bottom lip and attempting to master puppy-dog eyes. He looked stupid, but Nico was finding it all the more difficult to say no.

Also, he was hungry, and he knew a diner in Times Square that served twenty-four seven breakfast.

“Fine,” he grumbled, because despite the ridiculous little bit of excitement starting to bubble up inside, he had to maintain his anti-Will-Solace persona. “I guess it will have to be a surprise.”

Will grinned. “Oh! I like surprises.”

Cracking his knuckles behind him once in an attempt to stop his hands from shaking, Nico stood and motioned for Will to do the same. He then held out his arm.

Will just stared at it. “What?”

“Take it, idiot.”

“Are we—”

“Shadow-traveling, yes, you’ve done it before, no need for questions, and I’m *perfectly healthy enough*—”

“Okay.” And then, instead of his arm, Will grabbed onto his hand.

“What the hell, Solace.”

He didn’t intend for it to sound so harsh—he was simply shocked by how warm Will’s hand was, and *that’s all*—but fortunately, Will just smiled.

“Safer this way,” he said, lifting their arms up to eye level for a moment. “I’m less likely to slip off.” Then he coughed. “So, uh, take us away. Wherever we’re going.”

Glad to have an excuse to escape the increasingly awkward conversation, Nico slipped into the shadows.

He had not been expecting Will’s first question.

“Where are we?”

Scoffing, he gestured to the glowing billboards, the yellow taxis, and the silhouettes of the skyscrapers against the morning sun. “New York City, dumbass.”

“Oh,” Will replied. And then his face lit up, and he jumped back. “Oh!” He grabbed Nico’s hand again, this time with both of his. “Oh my gods; I had totally forgotten.”

Nico stared at their hands, trying to ignore the electric pulses being sent up his arm. “If you were going to forget, why’d you even ask in the first place?”

Will shrugged. “I don’t know, I guess I just...” He hesitated and pulled his hands away. “I guess I just didn’t think you’d actually take me here.”

“Oh.”

“But that was stupid of me. Because, look!” He gestured around them, spinning in a circle with his arms out. “Here we are.”

“Yeah,” Nico agreed. “Here we are.”

Will grinned. “Now, I don’t have a clue of where or what anything is here, so you’re going to have to be my navigator.”

Nico nodded, his heart skipping a beat. Why was his brain focusing solely on the “be my” part? *Navigator*, he shouted internally. *He just said navigator*.

“Okay,” he said aloud. “Uh, there’s this diner that I’ve been to a few times when I was in the area. Percy...” His voice faltered at the memory, but he cleared his throat, shoving it away,

and managed to continue. “He was the one who first brought me there. They have good French toast.”

“French toast sounds great,” Will replied, though he didn’t even seem to be focused on the conversation anymore. His eyes were on the sky—or the skyscrapers, rather—taking in the sights of city with every breath. It was sort of hilarious, the way he acted as if he had never seen a building higher than four stories or a crowd larger than fifty before.

“You look like a five-year-old,” Nico commented.

Will glanced down at him to glare, but his gaze darted back up almost immediately. “Shut up and take me to the French toast place.”

Nico couldn’t help grinning. Seeing Will so out of his element like this, so awestruck and oblivious…well, it was kind of adorable.

When his brain jumped to *that* conclusion, he told himself to shut up, but he couldn’t bring himself to be angry. Instead, he gestured over his shoulder and started heading toward a nearby crosswalk.

“It’s right down this street,” he said. “Follow me.”

What the hell was he getting himself into? Never in his life had he worked so hard to *please* someone. And never once had he become so anxious, yet also excited, over French toast.

So what was the deal with Will Solace? What gave him the right to dive headfirst into his life and create a whirlpool of strange new feelings, out of which there was likely no escape?

Truthfully, Nico realized, he head no fucking clue.

But he didn’t run when Will chased after him, didn’t flinch when he grabbed his hand, and didn’t cover his smile when it grew.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: The diner they are going to is inspired by one I had lunch in during my recent trip to NYC. Unfortunately, its name has already slipped from my memory. Oh well.

Also, I’m still recovering from the season finale of Attack on Titan (and I’m busy with a different project), so I apologize if this chapter wasn’t quite as well-written as the last few.

Next chapter should be out before this weekend.

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

“This is so you.” Will held a black bomber jacket with white stripes on the sleeves up to Nico’s shoulders.

“I’m not getting it,” he replied. “I already have a jacket. And I don’t even get cold, anyway.”

Will frowned. “I bet you don’t.” He returned it to its place, however, and then picked up a light blue one instead. “I’m gonna try this one on. But first, I need to find an outfit to go with it.”

“Do you really?”

Chapter Notes

This chapter is nothing but self-indulgent GARBAGE. Enjoy it, folks.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Oh my gods, I think I’m in Elysium.”

Nico raised an eyebrow as he cut a corner of toast with his fork. “It’s just regular old food, Will. There are loads of diners like this all over the city. This one really isn’t anything special.”

Will stuffed his face with another bite and then opened his mouth to speak, but Nico shook his head. “Wait until you’re done chewing, Solace. It’s a choking hazard. You of all people should know that.”

He quickly swallowed and then smiled. “Fine. But are you sure this place isn’t run by, like, the god of breakfast?”

“I’m sure.”

After they finished eating, Will insisted that he needed new clothes and dragged Nico into a nearby American Eagle.

“Nico, look at this!” Will exclaimed, immediately darting over to a rack of jackets. Nico begrudgingly trailed after him—he really had no interest in shopping.

“This is so you.” Will held a black bomber jacket with white stripes on the sleeves up to Nico’s shoulders.

“I’m not getting it,” he replied. “I already have a jacket. And I don’t even get cold, anyway.”

Will frowned. “I bet you don’t.” He returned it to its place, however, and then picked up a light blue one instead. “I’m gonna try this one on. But first, I need to find an outfit to go with it.”

“Do you really?” Nico mumbled.

Will either didn’t pick up on his irritated tone or didn’t care. “Yep.”

Nico had expected “finding an outfit” to take about five minutes, but he should have known that thirty was a more accurate estimate. After dozens of shirts were scrutinized and held up for Nico’s opinion—each received a simple shrug and a *hurry up, Solace*—and piles of pants were rifled through to find the correct size, Will seemed to finally have something.

“Wait here,” he said, gesturing to a comfy-looking chair outside the dressing rooms.

Nico sat down and let out a long sigh as Will slipped behind one of the curtains.

At one point while he was changing, a young woman with a name tag walked up to Nico, a dress in one hand and a hanger in the other. She brushed her dark hair over her shoulder and smiled. “Need any help?”

Nico glanced up at her and blinked. “Oh, uh, no, I’m just…waiting for a, uh, friend.”

She grinned again and brushed a hand over his shoulder as she walked away. “Okay. Well, if you need anything at all, you just call for me, alright?”

“Uh, yeah.” When she was finally gone behind an “employees only” door, his relief was short-lived.

“What was that all about?”

He looked up again and suddenly forgot how to breathe.

Will looked…well, to keep things concise, sky blue chinos rolled into capris paired with a fitted, open-collar gray button-down *really* suited him. He had apparently decided against the jacket, with which Nico was one hundred-percent okay. He began to feel like a sweaty, disgusting mess in his black skinny jeans and matching t-shirt, however.

It wasn’t until Will cleared his throat that Nico realized he had asked a question.

“Oh,” he managed. “Uh, she was just asking if I needed any help with, like, clothes or something.”

“Help with clothes,” Will muttered. “Yeah, sounds about right.”

“What?”

“Never mind,” he replied. He then took a step back, glancing down at himself. “So, what do you think? Too flashy, or...?”

“No,” Nico immediately blurted. “I mean, it’s flashy, but...it, uh, looks nice.” He swallowed. “You look nice.”

He didn’t really know why he was expecting some sort of backlash after that, because Will just smiled. “Thanks, Nico.” His cheeks were pink, Nico noticed.

“So, uh.” He glanced down at wrist even though he wasn’t actually wearing a watch. *How stupid are you?* “Uh, we should probably get back to camp. We didn’t tell anyone where we were going before we left, and they might, like...” He trailed off, watching as Will’s expression shifted to something more solemn.

“Oh,” he replied. “Right. Uh...” He glanced down at himself. “I’ll go change back, then. I don’t know what I was thinking, really; I don’t have any money...”

Some part of Nico *really* didn’t want that to happen, and he rose quickly from his chair. “No! I mean, you don’t have to. I’ve got some extra money, uh, from my dad. God of wealth and everything. I’ll pay for it.”

Will’s eyes widened. “What? Nico, you don’t have to do that.”

“Will. I said he’s the *god of wealth*. I could literally buy anything I wanted.”

“Are—are you sure?” Will stuttered. “You really don’t—”

“Excuse me, Miss.” As she strutted past, Nico tapped on the shoulder of the young woman who had spoken to him a few minutes ago.

She whirled around, tossing her hair over her shoulder, and batted her false eyelashes. “Yes?”

“We’re in a bit of a hurry, and I was wondering if you could ring up my friend’s new outfit without him having to change back first. Could you do that for us?”

Her eyes widened in confusion at first, but after Nico tossed in an awkward smile, she grinned. “Of course.” She glanced Will over—Nico *swores* he saw her lick her lips, which gave him a weird feeling in his stomach—and muttered some prices to herself. “Okay! I’ll put this into the checkout and you can come right over.” With that, she sauntered away, long hair bouncing.

When Nico turned around, he hadn’t been expecting Will to be staring at him like he had just summoned a ghost. “What?”

He grinned. “Wow. Nico di Angelo, I had no idea you were such a gentleman.”

It felt like all the blood in his body rushed to his head at once. “What?”

Will just poked him gently on the shoulder, that stupid smile still on his face. “I’ve gotta go get my old clothes. Be right back.”

What?

When Will returned after a few seconds, Nico was certain that his face was still red. He also couldn’t think of a complete sentence to say, so he just nodded toward the register and let Will follow him out of the changing room area.

The cashier girl stared shamelessly at Will the entire time they were standing in front of her, so Nico pulled out his black credit card, made the transaction, and headed out of the store as quickly as possible—not without a wink from her, however.

“She was totally into you.”

Nico whirled around to face Will, which was probably not the best move in the crowded street. “What?”

Will wasn’t quite smiling, but he looked like he wanted to. “That employee. She seemed to like you quite a bit.”

Nico snorted. “No way. Did you notice her staring at you?”

Will frowned. “I guess I didn’t. But you’re underestimating yourself.”

“I’m what?”

To that, he didn’t respond. “Let’s find a dark alley and get back home.”

Finding an alley with a sufficient supply of shadows took more searching than either of them expected. After a few minutes, however, they were all set to return to camp, but Will reached out a hand to stop Nico from grabbing his wrist.

“Wait,” he said. “I, uh... I want to say something first.”

Nico’s heart rate increased to unhealthy numbers. “What?”

Will ran a hand through his hair. “Thank you.” Then he slowly took Nico’s hand in his own, which didn’t improve the high blood pressure. For fuck’s sake, this guy was a *doctor*. He should have known better. “Thank you for today. It was really, really fun.”

“It wasn’t really a *day*,” Nico replied after a moment, because he was stupid like that. “It was kind of just two hours.”

Fortunately, Will laughed at that. “True. But it’s probably going to be the best part of my day today, so...”

He trailed off, and Nico recalled what had happened the night before. The crying, the fear, the utter misery...he had managed to distract Will for a while, but once he stepped back into that infirmary, it was probably all going to flood back over him.

"I—I can help when we get back," Nico blurted. "In the infirmary. With the bandages and stuff. If you want, I mean."

Will's smile widened again. "I would love that."

"Okay. I'll, uh, hang around, then." In a brief moment of bravery, he squeezed Will's hand.

"Good," Will said. "Now, let's get back to camp before Austin starts panicking. Trust me, nothing ever goes well when he panics."

"Okay."

When Will grabbed onto his other hand, he realized that shadow-traveling didn't feel quite so cold and dark anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Prepare yourselves for some actual plot and—what a surprise—more angst. It's somehow way easier to write.

EDIT 6/27: Probably should have added this when I posted this chapter, but I'm going to be in theatre camp for the next three weeks and most likely will not have much time to write. I might try to finish one this weekend, but chances are it won't happen until next weekend (or the weekend after that).

For anyone interested, we're doing Legally Blonde and I'm playing Brooke :)

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Nico glanced at the sky, estimating the time to be around three or four. Either way, Will should have been done with his infirmary shift by now, and Nico had made him promise to end on time, and he had also promised to work harder to keep his promises.

Nevertheless, he was nowhere in sight, and Nico took that as a cue to return to his cabin and have a nice nap.

Chapter Notes

I'M STILL ALIVE I PROMISE!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Nico wasn't quite sure what he was expecting for that night, but it certainly wasn't...this.

He had assisted Will in the infirmary for about an hour before Annabeth politely knocked on the door and informed him that he needed to tidy his cabin for inspection. Then, while he was still busy dusting the bed frames and nightstands, Percy barged in, a sweaty, panting mess, and begged Nico to follow him back to the arena. Apparently a bunch of young Ares and Nemesis kids were arguing over which of them would win in a sword match and some had even begun placing bets. After a two-hour, best-of-five fight (which he won, thank you very much), Nico walked the long way back to the cabins, passing by the strawberry fields, amphitheater, and volleyball court and glancing at each in search of familiar faces.

It hit him then that he was becoming so used to hanging out with friends all the time that he had begun to actively search for their company in moments of boredom such as this. But Annabeth was still busy with inspection, Percy stuck with another group of ten-year-olds, Jason and Piper out on some afternoon picnic they had planned. And Will...

Nico glanced at the sky, estimating the time to be around three or four. Either way, Will should have been done with his infirmary shift by now, and Nico had made him promise to end on time, and he had also promised to work harder to keep his promises.

Nevertheless, he was nowhere in sight, and Nico took that as a cue to return to his cabin and have a nice nap.

At around six, he heard the shouting of head counselors as they organized their cabins for dinner. Two hours later, campers ran past his cabin again, this time full of excited laughter and chatter as they headed for the campfire. He didn't join them for either—just breathed in and out, flat on his back, watching the sun set and the sky turn from blue to orange and back again through a window.

Yes, he had been sort of expecting Will to ask him what he wanted to do that evening, but it was foolish of him to hope like that. He was likely feeling pretty embarrassed from how vulnerable he had been with Nico the previous night, how he had opened up and spilled his emotions and even started crying. He probably hadn't intended for Nico to see all of that, and now he was wallowing in mortification.

Except Nico was pretty sure one of the laughs he had heard passing his cabin belonged to him.

Stop, he chided himself. Just stop. Will's been hanging out with you so much already. He's probably sick of you by now.

But his hopeful side wondered if the nighttime-cabin-rooftop thing could be considered a tradition by now, and if Will had an obligation to abide by it, especially considering how he had skipped last night and promised it wouldn't happen again.

Once he realized that arguing with himself wasn't going to initiate any sort of progress, Nico decided to surrender his consciousness to sleep.

A barely audible creaking awoke him the next morning.

When his eyes shot open, they were first blinded by the light streaming through his window—it was that unfortunate time of morning when the sun's angle was perfectly lined up with his face—and then they landed on the back of the figure who was closing his cabin door with the speed of a sloth.

“Hazel?”

She jumped, turning to face him with wide eyes. “Oh! Nico, did I wake you up? I was trying not to; I’m sorry—”

Nico sat up, shaking his head and pushing off his duvet. “No, no. It’s fine. It’s great to see you.” He glanced around his cabin at the messy piles of clothes and books he had left sprawled across the floor. “I had no idea you were coming today. I would have cleaned up a bit in here.”

Hazel laughed. “It’s okay. I don’t mind. You should see what the Fifth Cohort barracks have turned into since the war.”

Nico chuckled softly. While he was glad (albeit a little surprised) to see his sister, he couldn’t seem to muster much real joy. Which was stupid, because he had hung out with Will all day

yesterday and he had probably just wanted to spend the evening with his siblings. He didn't need to be with him twenty-four seven.

Not that being with Will made him that happy. Because it didn't.

He caught Hazel staring at him with narrowed eyes and forced a smile. "So. Uh, who else is here?"

Hazel sat down on her bed, set her suitcase next to her, and began rifling through it. "It's just me, Frank, and Reyna. We're here for Percy's party."

"Party?"

Her eyes widened. "Oh, yeah! He told me to tell you about it. He's having a birthday party the night after tomorrow, right after the campfire. He told me that you would probably say—"

"I'm not going."

She grinned. "He told me that you'd probably say that. But he also said to tell you that it's going to be really fun, not too many people, and that there will be blue cake made by his mother. The same kind as last time, he said, so I'm assuming you've tried it before."

His mind flashed back to the fire escape, Percy's fifteenth birthday, that godawful plan he'd made—

But then he glanced at Hazel and her warm smile, and out the window at all the kids in orange t-shirts filing past on their way to breakfast, and he listened to the echoes of their chorused laughter...and maybe his plan wasn't so bad after all. Maybe it was still stupid and reckless and entirely based on impressing his former crush, but maybe it had also managed to save the world that he was slowly learning to love.

Whoah. It was too early in the morning for this. He switched gears and rose from his bed, stretching his shoulders. "You're quite the messenger."

Hazel chuckled again. "Yeah. They're all at breakfast, and I stopped by the pavilion to say hi, but I wasn't really hungry." She glanced him up and down. "You, on the other hand, should go eat something, Mister Skeleton."

"Hey! I'm not that thin anymore. Will Solace has been forcing food down my throat."

Hazel raised an eyebrow. "And just who, may I ask, is Will Solace?"

Nico huffed and stared at the floor. "Oh, I don't even know where to *begin* with him."

"You'll have to introduce me."

"Don't say I didn't warn you."

When he glanced back up, however, she was grinning. "Nico, any friend of yours is a friend of mine. But if he's annoying, then he'll get what he deserves."

And Nico couldn't help smiling in return.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter seems kind of rushed to me and definitely isn't one of my favorites. Oh well.

As I added to the endnotes of the previous chapter, I'm currently in theatre camp and therefore don't have a whole lot of time to write, so updates will be sparse. The schedule will return to normal after two more weeks.

And if anyone's interested, the show we're doing at camp is Legally Blonde and I'm playing Brooke Wyndham :)

Also, this just hit 20k! Woot woot...I'm imagining it will end up being around 30-35k by the end, but I'm not sure.

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Reyna raised her hand for a fist bump, to which Nico gladly obliged. “How’ve you been, soldier?”

Nico took his seat, not exactly smiling at her but certainly not wincing, either. “I’ve been pretty well. You?”

Reyna just nodded. “Likewise.”

Hazel broke the moment’s silence. “You guys are friends, right? Not lawyers?”

Chapter Notes

I'm in love with Reyna oops
Enjoy, folks :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He ended up skipping breakfast and replaced it with a chat with Hazel about all of the happenings of New Rome, followed by a nice nap. He did allow his sister to drag him to the dining pavilion for lunch, however, and they counted as only two of the three attendees of the Hades table.

“Long time no see.”

Reyna raised her hand for a fist bump, to which Nico gladly obliged. “How’ve you been, soldier?”

Nico took his seat, not exactly smiling at her but certainly not wincing, either. “I’ve been pretty well. You?”

Reyna just nodded. “Likewise.”

Hazel broke the moment’s silence. “You guys *are* friends, right? Not lawyers?”

Reyna glanced between them. “I think *colleagues* is a more fitting term.” Her tone was flat, but she was grinning. “Seriously, though. It’s great to see you, Nico.

"Yeah. Same here." He paused. "Uh, I mean, the other way around. Like, it's good to see you. Not me."

Both girls laughed. "Good to know," Reyna replied. Then she set her fork down and leaned back, arms crossed. "So, I was thinking—you guys have a volleyball court here, don't you?"

Nico nodded. "Yeah."

"Wanna play?"

Nico took a bite of toast and chewed it to put off responding. Once he swallowed it, however, and Reyna was still staring at him expectantly, he nodded. "Um, yeah, sure, but...why?"

Hazel snorted. "Maybe because you're friends and it's fun, Nico."

Reyna shrugged, swallowing the last of her own breakfast. "Maybe. But also maybe because I wanted to talk to you."

Nico raised an eyebrow. "About what?"

"No need to get all defensive," she replied, though she sounded a bit off herself. "It's nothing to worry about. Just something I...overheard." She paused. "And volleyball's a fun thing to do while we chat."

Nico grunted and pushed his plate away. "Whatever it is, now I'm scared. Let's go get this over with." He then stood and Reyna followed suit. "See you later, Hazel?"

She grinned like she knew exactly what their conversation was about to entail. "Of course."

They walked out of the pavilion and across the green in silence, but Reyna posed her first question as soon as they stepped onto the volleyball court.

"How do you feel about Will Solace?"

Nico promptly dropped the ball he was holding onto his foot. "What?"

Reyna just shrugged and let it roll, catching it with the side of her ankle like a soccer player. "You know. Are you guys friends? Enemies? Do you even know each other?"

After momentary relief—Reyna seriously needed to watch the wording of her questions—Nico shrugged. "I...don't know." A complete lie, of course. Truthfully, his answer should have just been yes to all three. "Why?"

Reyna picked up the ball and spiked it over to him. "Like I said, I overheard something. But it's nothing, I guess."

Nico hit it back toward her in silence. He was so, so very tempted to ask her *what* exactly she heard, but Reyna wasn't the kind of person to spread gossip, so he didn't want to push it. Still, he couldn't help being a little too curious as to what could have been said regarding him and Will Solace. Or about him from Will Solace. The possibilities were endless.

Except they really weren't, Nico realized as he missed the ball, let it clunk to the ground, and watched it roll away. One was infinitely more likely than the others, and he could picture the scenario quite clearly in his mind.

A girl whispering to another: *Hey, who's that kid that Will's been hanging out with lately?*

It's that Hades kid. Creepy, right?

Ew. Why would Will want to be friends with someone like HIM?

Who knows. I bet it won't last. He'll run away again, just like he did before.

"Nico? Nico, are you with me right now?"

He stared across the green, to the campers who were still laughing and talking and enjoying their breakfasts.

"Nico? Can you hear me?"

He stared and stared until he could see a tall kid with messy hair and a voice that was the most luminous of them all.

"Nico?" A hand on his shoulder. "Shit, do I need to call someone?"

He stared and stared until a girl, the one from his imagination, whispered something in Will's ear and wiped that glowing smile away.

"Hey, Nico!" A slap to the side of his face. "Nico, what's going on?"

Finally, the sting of Reyna's backhand snapped his head around. "I don't know."

"What? Then I'll get a doctor or something, I'll—"

"I don't know how to feel about Will Solace."

Reyna's eyes stopped scanning his body and her hands stopped gripping his shoulders so tightly. "What?"

"You asked me. And I said I don't know."

After a beat, Reyna's hand found his own and she pulled him to the ground, silent and otherwise unmoving. They sat for a few moments without a word until she sighed.

"I didn't want to tell you because I thought you might be embarrassed or something, but what I overheard was something about you two being...like, a thing."

A thing.

Once he managed to process that simple (but meaningful) phrase, he shook his head rapidly. "We're not. Who said that? When did you hear it? Why—"

She raised a hand. “Slow down. It was this morning, and it was someone I don’t know. Maybe an Apollo kid because it was near their cabin, but I’m not positive.” She hesitated. “To be honest, from what little I heard, it kind of sounded like a joke.”

A joke.

“Yeah, uh, probably,” he replied.

“So...” Reyna trailed off and then cleared her throat. “Is there something going on that I should know about?”

He resisted the temptation to blurt out, *Yes! We’ve been hanging out together and doing fun things and I think we might even be friends but now he’s been avoiding me. Any advice?* Because he knew Reyna wasn’t a touchy-feely, emotionally-intelligent kind of person. She was a soldier, and so was he. They both had hearts that needed a bit of defrosting to be considered normal and a lack of communicative skill.

“He’s okay, I guess,” he said instead.

Reyna raised an eyebrow. “*Okay?* Are you sure it’s nothing more than that?” She leaned in closer and lowered her voice. “Listen, Nico, I saw him stretching on the front porch of his cabin this morning. I get it.”

Every drop of blood in his body seemed to rise to his face, and he covered it with his hands. “Shut up! Just—oh my gods, it’s nothing like that. Nothing. Alright?” But when he peeked back at her through his fingers, she was grinning. “Fine,” he huffed. “He is, objectively, a decent-looking person. But that’s not why I hang out with him.”

“So you do hang out with him?”

“I said *shut up.*”

She raised her hands in surrender. “Alright, alright, I guess I’m being a little unfair. But it’s okay to talk to me about...you know, stuff like that. I know I don’t seem like I would like listening to it, but...I’ll listen to whatever you want to talk about, Nico. I’m here for you.”

He wasn’t sure what he had been expecting, but not...that. And never in his life had he seen Reyna, praetor of New Rome and the Twelfth Legion, look so vulnerable and uncomfortable. “Really?”

She nodded, though, regaining some of her confident regality that he had come to understand and respect. “Really.”

Just that word made his chest feel a tiny bit warmer. Will’s words flashed through his mind. *You have friends here—or, at least, people who would like to be your friend. No one ever pushed you away.*

“Okay,” he said, breaking the awkward silence that inevitably ensued as he stood and retrieved the volleyball. “Will you listen to me if I say I’m going to kick your ass in this game?”

She grinned. "There's the one exception."

Chapter End Notes

My last week of theatre camp starts Monday and our show is Thursday, which means updates should be more frequent like they used to be after then. Although these next few chapters are going to be tricky to write...we'll see.

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

He knew that his sister could see through him better than anyone else, so how would he be able to convince her that nothing was wrong?

He didn't want to lie, either. Not to Hazel. Not after everything she had done for him.

He then felt a small hand rest on his shoulder. "I recognize the look in your eyes," she murmured. "It's the same one I used to see every time I looked in the mirror."

Nico raised his head. "What do you mean?"

Her eyes met his, and he noticed that they were the same color amber as Will's hair. Sticky, golden amber that you could get lost in.

"You think that you've hurt someone," she said.

Chapter Notes

Sorry that this took so long to get out. A more normal updating schedule should resume now that camp is over. Nevertheless, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

During dinner, Nico didn't realize he was casting repeated glances toward the Apollo table—to no avail—until Hazel pointed it out.

"Looking for someone?"

He quickly returned his gaze to his plate of steamed broccoli and mashed potatoes. "No."

Hazel sighed. "I don't buy that for a second, but I know not to push it with you."

Nico just shrugged as nonchalantly as possible and they continued eating. Truthfully, of course, he had been looking out for Will—even unconsciously, apparently. He hadn't exactly been *trying* to catch his attention every time he saw him surrounded by the rest of the Apollo campers, but he wouldn't be upset if he accidentally did so. For some reason, however, Will had managed to avoid every look and every possible encounter.

Kind of like he was trying to.

Nico set down his fork and stood. "I'm heading back to my cabin."

Hazel frowned. "Why?"

He pushed in his chair and pulled at the hem of his shirt. "Tired." Without another word, leaving Hazel with an accepting but puzzled expression, he retreated from the pavilion.

He found himself skipping the campfire that night, going to bed early, and sleeping until noon. He probably would have snoozed for even longer if Hazel hadn't poked repeatedly at his shoulder and pestered him to at least sit up and have a glass of water.

After pouring it and handing it to him, she sat on his bed next to him. "Are you feeling alright?"

Nico shrugged. "Yeah, I guess. Why?"

She bit at her bottom lip. "Well...it's just that you've been acting a little off since I've been here. Reyna said the same thing." She hesitated, averting her gaze to something across the room. "It's not something I did, is it?"

Nico blinked twice. "No!" he spluttered. "I mean...no, not at all. You're fine. I'm fine."

She sighed. "Well, that's good to know. But I don't think you are."

He didn't respond right away and instead took a sip of the water. He knew that his sister could see through him better than anyone else, so how would he be able to convince her that nothing was wrong?

He didn't want to lie, either. Not to Hazel. Not after everything she had done for him.

He then felt a small hand rest on his shoulder. "I recognize the look in your eyes," she murmured. "It's the same one I used to see every time I looked in the mirror."

Nico raised his head. "What do you mean?"

Her eyes met his, and he noticed that they were the same color amber as Will's hair. Sticky, golden amber that you could get lost in.

"You think that you've hurt someone," she said.

Nico stared at her. "When have you—" And then it hit him. "...oh."

Sammy.

Hazel nodded. "It's okay, Nico. You can tell me what's going on. I'll always be here to listen." She grinned. "And try to help, if that's possible. I do have some good advice sometimes."

Nico tried to smile, but it felt weird on his face muscles. “You’re too nice for your own good.”

She shrugged. “I don’t mind.” She then squeezed the hand on his shoulder. “Now *tell* me something.”

He sighed. “Fine. But I’m not naming names.”

“I never said you had to.”

“Okay.” He took a deep breath. “There’s someone I’ve been...hanging out with. And I’m scared that people are talking about us—like, saying that they’re weird for being friends with me.” He hesitated. “If we even are friends. And they’ve been completely avoiding me.”

Hazel waited a moment before speaking again. “I know you said no names, but is this the Will guy you mentioned?”

A flush rose to Nico’s ears and cheeks. “Maybe.”

And then suddenly he was engulfed in her arms, and the next moment he was crying into her shoulder.

“It’s just—” He heaved out a sob. “—it’s just that he’s the first person besides you and Reyna and Jason maybe, the first person in this camp—” Another sob. “—to ever seem like they *want* to be friends with me. But now I’ve gone and ruined it.”

“Shh,” Hazel murmured, rubbing her hands up and down his back. “It’s not your fault, Nico. You didn’t ruin it.”

“Yes I did!” His voice was coming out screechy and shriek-y. “It’s because I’m so bad at all of this. I never know what to do or say or where and when I should—I don’t know.” He cascaded into another pit of crying, letting his tears soak into his sister’s shirt and praying she wouldn’t mind.

“Shh,” she said again, like a soft hum. “I think you should talk to him, Nico. That’s the only way you’ll find out what’s going on.”

He shook his head rapidly.

“Fine,” she sighed and then leaned back to look him in the eye. “Do you want me to talk to him, then?”

He hesitated and sniffled. Did he really want his little sister taking care of his boy trouble for him? That seemed pretty pathetic. On the other hand, though, his sister had experience—probably more than he ever would.

“Not today,” he said. “I...I want to wait and see if something changes.” He tried to even his breathing. “I think I should give him some space if that’s what he wants.”

Hazel frowned for a moment but then nodded. “I’ll accept that, but if this goes on for much longer...” She shook her head. “I’m not sure Reyna’s going to be able to hold back from whacking that kid upside the head, either.”

Nico rolled his eyes, but he did feel a tiny bit of a smile creeping up on him and the flow of tears seemed to be ceasing and drying on his skin. “You don’t even know him.”

Hazel nodded. “I’m aware. But remember that we’re all here for you, Nico. Okay?”

He let his head fall back into his sister’s shoulder and her arms immediately wrapped around him again. “Okay.”

Chapter End Notes

this is giving me solangelo withdrawals

Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

“Nico?”

Oh gods, oh no.

He resisted whirling around and turned as slowly as he could. All motion stopped, however, when he met his eyes, quizzical and confused and also looking really tired and definitely hiding something deeper and darker.

When Will cleared his throat, most of it vanished. His back straightened and he flicked a strand of hair from his face. “What...uh, what are you doing here?”

Chapter Notes

Enjoy this; it's almost twice as long as usual.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next morning, he awoke with a brilliant plan.

He was the son of Hades, known for darkness, shadows, and being antisocial. Perhaps he wouldn't be able to talk to Will Solace, but he *could* spy on him. It was perfect—no one ever noticed him, even in broad daylight when he wasn't trying at all to be hidden. He'd simply dress as inconspicuously as possible, find a copy of the camp schedule from someone who actually had one (he had no idea where to get one of those things, but it didn't seem important), and figure out just what Will could be hiding.

Of course, there was the issue of the morality of the whole situation. He made a silent agreement with himself, though, to stop listening if he heard a conversation start to get personal.

He rolled out of bed and began ruffling through his dresser. Should he wear his usual black? It was expected, but if he found himself in a place he didn't frequent, he might stand out in the sea of orange t-shirts.

Orange t-shirts. He pulled out his own, tried it on to make sure it still fit, and decided that it was his best bet for blending in with the crowd.

And thus his plan began.

He checked the clock on his nightstand—five A.M. He rarely woke up this early, usually only when he had something on his mind like this. Jason likely wouldn't be awake yet—though Nico had no idea of what time he usually left to go on his morning jog. After some contemplation, he decided to wing it, slipped out his front door, and walked up to the Zeus cabin.

Jason answered after the fifth knock, each louder than the last.

“Piper, I’m not—oh! Uh, Nico? Hi?”

Nico frowned at him and his purple t-shirt and plaid pajama pants. “Why do you seem so surprised to see me?”

Jason blinked at him once and then rubbed at his eyes with a fist. “Sorry. It’s early, man. And you always sleep so late.” He just squinted for a moment, like he was trying to read one of those eye tests. “What are you doing here?”

Nico twisted his skull ring between his thumb and index finger. “I need a copy of the camp schedule.”

“What?” He blinked again and narrowed his eyes even further. “Why do you need the schedule? And why wouldn’t you just get one from Chiron?” He paused. “And why does your face look so blurry?”

Nico frowned. “Too many questions, but I just do, I don’t want to, and you forgot your goddamn glasses, idiot.” He counted off each answer on a finger and held them up for Jason to see. “How many?”

He scowled. “Rude. Three. I’m not blind.”

“Really? You sure seem like it sometimes.”

Jason leaned against the doorframe. “Do you want the schedule or not?” Nico nodded, and he sighed, turning to head back into his cabin. “You’re lucky I’m giving this to you without question. It’s my only copy.”

“Knowing you, you’ve got it memorized, Roman.”

He didn’t respond to that but returned in a few moments with a chart on a white sheet of paper. It was folded and creased almost to the point of tearing, as if it had been in many pants’ pockets.

“Thanks,” Nico said as he took it.

“No problem,” Jason said. “But, still, you could’ve asked Chiron. This is supposed to be my last bit of sleeping time before my morning jog.”

“You and your damn morning jogs will be the death of me.”

Jason just smiled. “Catch you later, Nico. When I’m more awake I’ll be on my knees begging to know what in Zeus’ name you’re up to.”

“Of course.”

Once Jason retreated back into his cabin and closed the door, Nico unfolded the paper and scanned the column marked “Cabin Seven.” Eight AM...breakfast and cabin inspection. Nine o’ clock, swordplay in the arena. According to this schedule, he had a while to wait before Will would even be awake.

Fortunately, however, he knew Will Solace on a more personal level than the directors of their camp. He knew that, being someone who adhered to all stereotypes and literally rose with the sun, this particular demigod was most likely already out of bed and hard at work. He knew that in Will’s mind, all tasks were never complete—there was always another patient to be checked on, another cabinet to organize, another countertop to be sanitized.

So, because he knew all this, Nico found himself standing in front of the entrance to the camp infirmary just as dawn broke the sky.

It was then, of course, that it hit him just how ridiculous he was being.

You’re spying on a boy just because you think he might hate you and you want to know why? How pathetic. This is so stupid. He’s going to catch you and you’re going to get caught and you’re going to die alone—

“Nico?”

Oh gods, oh no.

He resisted whirling around and turned as slowly as he could. All motion stopped, however, when he met his eyes, quizzical and confused and also looking really tired and definitely hiding something deeper and darker.

When Will cleared his throat, most of it vanished. His back straightened and he flicked a strand of hair from his face. “What...uh, what are you doing here?”

It sounded too forced. Too formal, like he was questioning Nico on official business and had never once met him before.

Then Nico realized he should probably say something and stop gaping like a fish at the fact that Will Solace was actually talking to him again, because it was weird and not right and nothing over which to be even a little excited.

“Oh,” he managed. “I was just, you know, on a walk.”

Great job, Nico. What a convincing monologue.

“Okay,” Will replied. “Well, I’m gonna sneak past you into the infirmary, if you don’t mind.” Nico nodded quickly and stepped to the side, allowing him access to the door and

surrendering all chances at some sort of conversation. In a matter of seconds, Will had his hand on the doorknob, and then he was turning it, and then—

“Wait.” Nico rushed to grab his wrist. “Wait,” he repeated. The word tasted bitter and sweet all at once, and it was addictive. “I need to... I wanted to... ask you...”

“Why you’ve been completely avoiding me for the past four days?” Will blurted. He yanked his hand away. “Yeah, I’ve been wondering about that, too.”

Nico just stared. Will thought *he* was the one avoiding *him*? No fucking way was he going to let that slide.

“I wasn’t!” he shouted. “What the hell do you mean, Will?”

Will’s eyes widened as he raised his voice as well. “What do I mean? I mean that you haven’t come by the infirmary at all to help like you promised!”

“Yeah, well, I’m not the only one who’s been breaking promises! *You* promised that you would stop overworking yourself! I’ve been waiting around every day for you to finish your shift, but you never do!” He took a breath and forced himself to look him dead in the eye. “So *you’re* the one who’s been doing the avoiding. Don’t turn this on me.”

“I—” Though he was definitely about to continue, Will paused and slowly lowered his raised hands. “I guess I am.” His voice was barely audible, even in the silence of the early morning. Suddenly his tired eyes were visible again for a moment before they dropped to the ground. “I just... I always feel like I can’t help with much here, so I like to stay in the infirmary for as long as I can.” He glanced back up. “But I’ve told you all that, and you probably don’t want to hear it again.”

Nico took a cautious step forward, still leaving some distance between them. “It’s okay.” He remembered what Reyna had told him and the warmth it had sparked in his core. “You can... tell me stuff. I don’t mind.”

Will then smiled, but it looked pained, as if his face muscles were sore. “Thanks, Nico.”

“Yeah,” he replied. Why did a smile always make him start to stutter? “Uh, anytime.”

After a strange but satisfying silence, Will glanced toward the door behind him. “Well, I actually do have some work to get done.”

Nico cleared his throat. “But I’ll see you later? Percy’s party?”

For a moment, what looked like panic flashed behind his eyes. “Uh, that’s tonight? Well, um, we’ll see. I’ll see if I can get the night shift off. Maybe.” He then glanced at Nico, back to the door, and then sort of ran at him—

—and engulfed him in a hug.

In his shock, Nico didn’t even think to return the gesture, so his arms were left hanging, frozen, but the rest of him was so, so warm. Once or twice he had considered what it might

be like to hug Will Solace, but he had never imagined it actually happening in real life. It had never occurred to him that they were sort of friends, despite everything weird going on and the pain in his eyes he still had yet to figure out, and that friends sometimes did stuff like this. But it was nice. Really nice.

In what felt like less than a second, however, it was over and Will was turning away, his hand already turning the doorknob. Nico couldn't find any words and ended up just staring.

He stepped into the infirmary, but before he closed the door behind him he turned around for just a moment, and Nico noticed tears in his eyes.

"Bye, Nico."

Chapter End Notes

dun dun duuuuuun

i wanna see predictions so i can laugh evilly at them while procrastinating writing the next chapter

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Nico wasn't going to the party, he reaffirmed. He had no place there among the teenagers who would most likely be holding light conversations, making out in dark corners, playing pranks, and daring each other to do stupid things. Nothing that he wanted any part in.

...Except that he was getting kind of bored, knew that he wouldn't be able to fall asleep yet, and was holding onto a tiny glimmer of hope that Will might just be there.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I apologize for this chapter taking longer than it should have to be written. Nevertheless, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

From the roof of his cabin, he watched the sky darken.

The sun had long sunk past the horizon, but a warm blue hue still lined the tops of the trees and fell behind them like a curtain. A flock of birds, likely embarking on their autumnal southward journey, rustled the highest branches and cawed in a roaring chorus—but they didn't surpass the blend of laughter and chatter coming from a campfire that, though Nico could see it from his lofty perch, still seemed so distant.

He tried to make out some familiar faces in the crowd, but his attempts were mostly in vain. The only camper he could identify was Reyna, and only because she was sitting on the outskirts, head and shoulders above most of the others and not laughing as expressively along with the rest of them.

He was pretty sure that he was the only person not in attendance, but he didn't care. Not now, with how unsettling and frustrating his day had been.

Not that he ever cared, of course...right?

His mind flashed back to earlier this morning, as it had been doing all day, playing the same scene on repeat. Will had hugged him—for more than just a brief second. He had held on to him, and he had before, of course, but this time felt different for some reason and Nico couldn't for the life of him figure out why.

He gazed toward the amphitheater again, the orange glow of the fire drawing in his vision like a magnet and the faint hum of an acoustic guitar catching his ears. They had to have been there for at least an hour by now, which meant that Percy's party would be starting shortly. The cue for them to leave early—to avoid harpy encounters—was supposed to be a bad joke spoken in front of everyone about seahorses. He'd have to watch to see when someone would stand from their seat and a group of ten or so older campers slipped away one by one.

Not that he was going to the party, however. He had no interest and no place there. He wasn't a particularly celebratory guy. Besides, he had already been to Percy's fifteenth birthday two years ago, tried the famous blue cake, seen the wide-eyed smile he gave his parents and brother as he opened each gift, no matter what was inside. He wasn't even good friends with him or any of the other invites, except for Hazel and Reyna and maybe Jason on a good day.

And, well, Will.

Nico briefly wondered if he was the one playing the guitar. He had mentioned something before about being the worst musician in his cabin, but Nico was pretty sure the standards were quite extreme. Then again, he had said something earlier about a night shift...

Nico wasn't going to the party, he reaffirmed. He had no place there among the teenagers who would most likely be holding light conversations, making out in dark corners, playing pranks, and daring each other to do stupid things. Nothing that he wanted any part in.

...Except that he was getting kind of bored, knew that he wouldn't be able to fall asleep yet, and was holding onto a tiny glimmer of hope that Will might just be there.

With one last sigh, he slipped into the darkness.

He hadn't meant to shadow-travel directly onto Jason's lap, but things happen.

After matching shrieks of which neither were very proud, he tumbled to the floor with a thud, landing at the foot of Percy's sofa.

Luckily, no one else seemed to be around to witness the incident.

"Let's forget this ever happened?" Nico suggested.

"Agreed," Jason replied. He then offered a hand and pulled him up onto the couch to sit this time at a respectable distance. "We're the first ones here. Percy's in the bathroom. Annabeth and Piper said they had to grab something from one of their cabins. Frank wanted one more s'more before we left the campfire, and Reyna and Hazel are with him." He frowned. "I'm not sure who else is coming. Maybe the Stolls?"

Nico shuddered. They were not the kind of people he wanted at *his* birthday party. Not that he would have one, of course.

Then Jason smiled. "I'm glad you're here, though. I didn't actually think you'd come."

Nico glared at him. “Better not give me any reason to leave, then.”

Jason raised his hands in surrender. “I’ll try my best.”

Just then, the door open, and entered Annabeth and Piper, all giggles and shushes.

Jason sat up. “What’s going on, guys?”

Piper pulled a white cardboard box from behind her back with a huge grin. “Oh, nothing. Just preparing the *cake*.”

He frowned. “Why do I not believe you?”

Annabeth set a similar box on the coffee table and marked it with a pen from her pocket. “Jason, she’s entirely correct, actually. She just happens to be the one with the, ah...*tampered cake*.”

Jason covered his face with a hand and fell back, groaning.

“What did you guys do?” Nico asked, a little curious. As much as he didn’t want to be there, he would love to see Percy’s reaction to whatever the girls had in store.

Piper and Annabeth smirked knowingly at each other. “You’ll see, Nico,” Piper said. Then she turned to him. “And I’m so glad you could make it!”

“Why does everyone keep saying that?” Nico grumbled.

Piper looked as if she were about to lean forward and pinch his cheek, and he was grateful that she didn’t. “Because,” she said instead, “we all really like you. You’re a good friend. What other reasons do we need?”

He rolled his eyes. “No wonder you and Jason get along so well.” Then Jason elbowed him, but he was actually sort of smiling. Almost. Maybe this was what friendship with these irrationally zany, irritatingly outgoing demigods could be like. Maybe he could be one of them.

And then Percy stepped out from his bathroom, arms spread wide like he was playing the lead in his own Broadway show. “Hey everyone! Who’s ready to party?”

Chapter End Notes

if you can guess the prank you win seven gold stars

Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

“Your mom made it for us,” Annabeth said as she placed the cardboard box on their makeshift kitchen table (a folding one borrowed from the rec room) and lifted the lid. It was, in true Sally Jackson spirit, frosted blue.

“It looks great,” Percy replied. He hefted the knife in his hand. “Shall I?”

Annabeth grinned. “Go right ahead.”

Chapter Notes

Heads up: My posting schedule is going to get more spotty (I hate that word) as I get busier. I was originally intending to finish this before September, but we'll see about that (*cough* it's highly unlikely *cough*).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Fast-forward one hour, and Nico was still sitting on the same couch to which he had shadow-travelled, wedged between his sister and Jason. They were mid-discussion about all the ways Camp Jupiter felt different—better—now that Octavian was gone and they had a stable (albeit new) relationship with their east-coast counterpart. Though Nico wasn’t all that interested, they continuously asked him questions and left time for him to chime in—which he did, occasionally—and he found himself feeling eternally grateful to both of them. For years, he had felt nothing but bitter exclusion; whether it was mainly self-inflicted or the result of others was trivial. Now, finally, he could allow himself to experience something else. Something nicer.

Nice. Yeah, it was nice. Still, however, there was that irksome feeling in the pit of his stomach whenever he found himself glancing around the room, hoping to catch a glimpse of a lanky blond kid wearing a surgeon’s shirt...

Luckily, there were plenty of distractions—one of which being the cutting of the cake.

“Your mom made it for us,” Annabeth said as she placed the cardboard box on their makeshift kitchen table (a folding one borrowed from the rec room) and lifted the lid. It was, in true Sally Jackson spirit, frosted blue.

“It looks great,” Percy replied. He hefted the knife in his hand. “Shall I?”

Annabeth grinned. “Go right ahead.”

She then glanced at Piper, and they both burst into silent laughter, but Percy seemed oblivious to it all. He lowered the knife into the cake, cut a slice, and lifted it onto a paper plate with the help of two forks.

He gazed around the room. “Alright, who wants the first piece?”

Annabeth immediately shook her head. “No, no, no. It’s your birthday; *you* get the first piece.”

He narrowed his eyes for a brief moment before shrugging, cutting himself a messy bite, and lifting the fork to his mouth.

There was a moment in which everything was fine, and then a moment when it wasn’t.

“Oh,” was all that escaped Percy’s mouth at first. “Um.” Nico could immediately see straight through his pretense of enjoyment. His mouth twitched and his eyes widened. He attempted to smile through it, but all he could manage was an awkward, repeated nod. “Yeah. This tastes, uh, cool.”

And then he went to swallow, and he coughed. A lot. Nico—and everyone else in the quieted room, it seemed—was genuinely surprised he was able to get it all down without choking it up and out first, based on his various pathetically confused facial expressions.

“Well,” he said, clearing his throat again. “Uh, that tasted really...interesting. I didn’t even know they made, uh, mint frosting. It’s really...” He coughed again. “...Strong. Strong flavor.” And then he reached for another bite, his fork moving so reluctantly that it all could have been a slow-motion video.

A hush fell over the entire party like a blanket for about five seconds as they all watched it being lifted higher and higher. Nico swore he could feel him wincing from the other side of the room. But then suddenly Annabeth was lunging, and Piper was cackling, and there was sticky blue stuff all over all three of their hands as the fork was yanked from his hands.

“Oh, thank the gods,” Frank muttered next to Nico. “I couldn’t bear to watch him do that again.”

Nico narrowed his eyes at the cake. “What the hell is it?”

Piper whirled around, facing him with a mad gleam in her eyes and blue goop on her fingers. “Toothpaste!” she exclaimed. “It’s a toothpaste cake!” She gazed around the room, arms raised as if expecting applause. “Genius, right? It was mainly Annabeth’s idea, of course. I just convinced her to actually go through with it.”

Reyna nodded in approval. Hazel burst into laughter. Nico himself actually started clapping. It was a worthy prank, after all—and he had to admit, it was priceless to see Percy so simultaneously confused and horrified.

The whole time, he just stood there, hands still open and covered in sticky blue toothpaste. “What?” he finally managed after a solid ten seconds. “You guys...*toothpaste*?”

Annabeth pat his shoulder in mock sympathy. “Don’t worry, Seaweed Brain; we’ve got you a real cake, too.” She gestured to Piper, who was now cutting into the other white box. “Your mom would have been too disappointed in us if we ruined *hers*.”

After a moment, he grinned. “She sure would. Great prank, though.” Then he leaned into his girlfriend’s ear and whispered something inaudible above the noise, though Nico suspected based on Annabeth’s reaction that it had something to do with payback and/or retaliation.

The rest of the party slipped by in a fairly well-paced manner. Nico was a little startled when he noticed the clock striking midnight after what had barely seemed like an hour—usually spending time with people drained him and made time move as slowly as Kronos could, but today felt different. He felt welcomed.

That wasn’t to say he wasn’t absolutely exhausted, of course. He stood and began the inescapable good-byes, see-you-soons, and yes-I-mean-tomorrows. He needed nothing more right then than some alone time and some rest—though when he stepped into his cabin, it seemed more like he was doing so to recharge his battery rather than evade some horrible torture. It felt...deserved.

Still, of course, there was one thing still on his mind that just wouldn’t leave. During the party, he had managed to shove it to a far recess of his brain, but now, being alone, it had made its inevitable return.

Shut up, he told his mind. *Stop. Shut up and go to sleep.*

And he did fall asleep, eventually. But it was only after the perturbing, repeated images of raw, shaking hands and moonlight reflecting off of tears flashed again and again behind his closed eyes.

Chapter End Notes

I was going to make the party longer but I got bored

Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Percy then leaned forward on his elbow, head on his hand. “Hey, what ARE Will’s plans for the fall?”

Nico froze.

Chapter Notes

i have been waiting to write this chapter for mONThS

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“...and then Chiron eventually let me go, but he made me swear on the River Styx that he’d never catch me and Annabeth jumping into the canoe lake in prom outfits at three A.M. ever again.”

Nico took a bite of his waffle. “Fun.”

Jason shook his head. “I still think Piper charmspoke you into it, even if it was originally your idea.”

“Maybe a little,” Percy replied through a mouthful of his own breakfast. “But it’s always just been on our bucket list, you know? And it was awesome.”

Jason nodded. “Won’t you have senior prom at your school this year, though? Couldn’t you have just waited a few months?”

Percy’s eyes widened for a moment, as if Jason had just told him he had to fight Kronos again. “Oh, holy Hades.” Then he glanced at Nico. “Oops. Sorry.”

“Carry on,” Nico mumbled.

“Yeah,” Percy continued. “To be honest, I had completely forgotten about school until right now. Do I still have to go?”

Jason raised his eyebrows. “You did make a commitment with your girlfriend.”

Percy groaned, glancing over his shoulder toward the Athena table. Annabeth was there, talking to one of her siblings with a stern look that quickly turned into a smile. “Yeah. I guess

she'd be pretty pissed if I bailed, huh?" He paused. "Yeah, I wouldn't do that to her. I'll go."

While he was turned away, Jason had managed to cut his pancake into two misshapen hearts and was now holding them in front of his eyes with a goofy smile.

"Oh, shut up," Percy said, but he was grinning. He then turned to Nico. "So, I've heard enough about Jason going to L.A. with Piper; what are your plans for the school year?"

Nico hesitated. "Well, uh, I'll just kind of stay here, I guess. I'm not really interested in actually going to school."

Percy nodded. "I get it. Chiron offers a few classes here, though, and I've heard they're alright. Might want to give it a shot."

"Take some science-y ones, like—oh, I don't know—anatomy, or pharmaceutical studies," Jason added, wiggling his eyebrows.

Nico resisted the urge to slap him and didn't respond.

Percy then leaned forward on his elbow, head on his hand. "Hey, what are *Will's* plans for the fall?"

Nico froze.

Had he seriously never asked? Why was he so goddamn *stupid* all the time? Of course Will must have plans for the year. He had a mother in Texas and maybe even more family that Nico didn't know about. He had a career plan, too—he really did want to get into medical school someday. He had a drive to learn, to expand his horizons, to explore...

Nico had none of that. No family, no passions, no aspirations.

Dread filling his stomach like a bag of sand, he directed his gaze over his shoulder, toward table seven.

He spotted Kayla immediately, with her bright green highlights, and then Austin, because for some reason he was holding a saxophone, and a few other familiar faces that he couldn't put names to just yet, because Will had said he was going to teach him all of them...

Will, who was nowhere to be seen.

Jason must have noticed the obvious panic in his eyes, because he laid a firm hand on his arm. "Nico, what's wrong?"

Suddenly, their orange Camp Half-Blood t-shirts (Nico had only elected to wear one this morning because all his other laundry was dirty) felt more like prison jumpsuits.

Nico quickly rose to his feet, abandoning his fork with a clatter. "I...I need to go."

Jason followed suit. "Nico, wait—"

And then he ran.

The overworking. The avoiding. The spontaneous hugging. The way he had sounded so distraught the last time they had a conversation. Was all of it due to *this*?

Nico sat on the floor at the foot of his bed. If so, why? Will could have just told him he was leaving. He could have just mentioned it casually during a conversation. That would have made things totally fine...right?

Except maybe he had a reason. Maybe he didn't want Nico to know. Maybe he started avoiding him because of those murmurs and snickers, and he didn't want to be followed or missed.

But he hugged you, Nico's memory reminded him. That had to mean *something*, right?

Yeah, his logical side replied. *Maybe pity.*

"Shut up," Nico said aloud. "Just shut up. It doesn't even matter, okay? He obviously doesn't care, or doesn't want me to care, and guess what? I *don't*. I don't care about him or what he thinks of me."

It was as if he couldn't hear himself speak, however, because the tears came, and they came in numbers.

Why did he have to be like this? He had been working so hard, almost fully adjusting to camp life, starting to feel *welcome* for once in his life...and then he had to go and ruin it all by caving into the wants of his stupid emotions, his gross feelings. He just couldn't get anything goddamn right.

He almost laughed aloud at himself in between sobs. How had he managed to convince himself that he was doing well? He was right back at square one. Hell, he could even see through his hands again. He had come full circle. It was just like with Percy—

...Wait, he thought. Why am I thinking of Percy? I haven't fallen THAT far back...have I?

He tried imagining a face in his mind—the face he had just seen at breakfast, telling some stupid joke about something he hadn't cared to remember...prom dresses, maybe? But there were no weird feelings, nothing out of the ordinary (as of what could be considered "ordinary" these days). Nothing along the lines of...butterflies.

Just then, he wanted to sucker punch himself. Why did he keep thinking about the stupidest stuff like that? It wasn't like he was...oh, no.

The face in his mind was shifting, turning into another's. A face that he had been seeing quite a lot of recently, and yet he still couldn't decipher what exactly lied behind its eyes.

A wave of *déjà vu* washed over him. *Percy*, he immediately thought. *Wait, no. This can't be...I...I can't LET this be...*

He closed his eyes and saw nothing but Will. Will, who was always humming along to stupid songs that he never bothered to learn the names of and smiling his stupid perfect smile. Will, who looked too much like his father with his stupid goldilocks hair. Will, who made stupid jokes and inserted medical references into everyday conversation.

Will, who Nico realized he had stupid, stupid feelings for.

Chapter End Notes

if you enjoyed, leave a comment!! even if you didn't, still leave a comment!!

(with your reaction you can call me a liar you just witnessed the roast of dani snot on fire)

Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

I have a crush on Will Solace.

It bothered him that, even after staring at it for a few minutes, it didn't seem wrong.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this chapter took so long to get out. I could say I've been working hard on it for a while, but the truth is that more than half of it was written within the past ten minutes. Nevertheless, enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Nico figured it didn't take the average person thirteen days to process this, but here he was, waking up to a crisp, cool morning, writing on a napkin.

He leaned his elbows against his bedside table, pen in hand, legs stretched out behind him. This position was not the best for his back, but minor physical pain was irrelevant at this point.

I like Will Solace, he wrote. And then he looked at it again. And then he scribbled it out. *Like* was too ambiguous of a word.

He touched the pen to the napkin again. A second passed. Then he moved his hand, slowly dragging it downward to draw a line and then lifting it to etch another. After a moment, he had another sentence—a bolder, darker one that anyone could tell he spent longer writing.

I have a crush on Will Solace.

It bothered him that, even after staring at it for a few minutes, it didn't seem wrong. Eventually, he shoved the napkin into a drawer, stood, walked over to his dresser, and pulled out a pair of jeans and one of his many black t-shirts. Turning away from the mirror—he wasn't a huge fan of his reflection—he slipped out of his pajamas and into the clothes.

This is stupid, he told himself. *It's stupid and it will go away.*

But it hadn't yet, he realized, and based on his recent reasoning, he had already been crushing on Will for much longer than he initially believed.

He turned around again, intending to fix his hair a little before he left his cabin, but froze in front of the mirror.

He had never seen this shirt before.

He glanced down at it, then back at the mirror, and then back down again. It said *Ramones* in white letters and had some sort of weird logo he didn't recognize. The name, however, sounded strangely familiar...

Out of curiosity, he pulled the collar toward his face and sniffed. It smelled sort of lemony, but less like fresh-baked merengue and more like Clorox disinfectant—a scent he only knew because of the long, tedious hours he had spent in a particular building.

Suddenly the memory flooded back to him—Will, in the infirmary, just a few days after they first met. He was playing a bunch of music off of something he called an iPod, scoffing at him and telling him jokingly that he was “uncultured” because he hadn’t listened to this particular band before and that he “wasn’t living up to his looks.” Nico hadn’t thought much of it at the time, but now...

This shirt must have been Will’s. But how did it end up in his drawer? And why?

He stared at himself in the mirror for a moment longer. Should he take it off? Put it back where he found it? Return it to the Apollo cabin?

He didn’t really want to. It was soft and fit just right. So he kept it on, messed with his hair for a few more seconds, and then headed for the door, praying desperately that his stupid feelings would be left behind and dissipate the moment he stepped out.

Of course, he was wrong.

Instead, he just became instantly acutely aware of everyone passing by him, each camper on their way to breakfast, as if he was made of cellophane and they could all see straight through to his core, his pulsing heart, his hidden feelings. There were rarely secrets kept at Camp Half-Blood. They were all one big happy family, after all, a group of siblings and friends who trusted each other—for the most part. Keeping something away from everyone else like this was part of Nico’s lifestyle, yes, but yet another reason tacked on to his ever-growing list of why he just didn’t fit in here.

Take Percy and Annabeth, for example. Everyone at camp knew they had a thing for each other long before they even realized it themselves. The same applied to Charlie and Silena, and Lou Ellen and Cecil (who technically still hadn’t reached the “realize it for themselves” phase quite yet, which honestly surprised Nico and frustrated him more than it should have, but he’d get into that some other day), and Chris and Clarisse. Everyone knew everything the Stoll brothers stole from the other cabins, but no one ever ratted them out. Everybody knew about Austin’s saxophone YouTube videos that he was embarrassed about and tried to hide and told them all not to spread around (though of course they still did). Secret feelings and secret desires had no place there and were bound to be exposed.

As he trudged toward the pavilion, Nico heard the hiss of a whisper from his right side and glanced up. A few paces away, a girl he sort of recognized from Ares was saying something into another girl's ear, her hand cupped over her mouth and preventing him from reading her lips. Their eyes met for a brief, extremely awkward moment, and then Nico was looking back down at the ground and picking up his pace a little. He swore one of them giggled as he walked past.

Another fact everyone knew: Nico di Angelo was weird and creepy and never stuck around for too long. That was about all they knew for sure about him, in fact, because he had only told a few select people about where he had been, what he had done, and who he had loved, and rumors get twisted.

Will Solace was one of those people, because Nico trusted him—or at least thought he did. Now he was off somewhere he didn't know with friends he didn't know for a time he didn't know. Nico really hated not knowing, especially when he knew that there were friends and siblings of Will who definitely *did* know and could give him answers but he couldn't ask them because Will had obviously not told him these things for a reason.

As he approached the dining pavilion, he glanced behind himself for a quick second and caught a glimpse of the two girls. They were still talking, still lurking behind him but far away enough this time that he couldn't hear them at all.

Everyone at Camp Half-Blood also knew that Will was one of the kindest, sweetest, pure-hearted souls on the face of the Earth. And they knew that Nico had no business trying to tear that down by trying to become his friend—or worse, something more.

He stepped into the buffet line, letting his hair fall over his eyes as if it could shield him from any observing eyes that might otherwise see right through his skin.

He would ignore it, he decided. He would ignore his secrets. He would ignore his feelings. And, in turn, he'd hope that everyone else would ignore him.

He didn't want to have to leave again. He did have some friends here now, people he actually cared about and enjoyed seeing (almost) every day. But if he had to, he would. If he couldn't suppress his emotions, he decided, leaving it all—leaving Will—would be for the best.

Chapter End Notes

I appreciate every comment, so leave your thoughts below!

Also, I'd like to give you all fair warning that updates are going to get more spotty as my classes begin. As it is, I'm already bogged down in a lot of work (I've started two classes, I'm directing a show, I'm on a dance team, I'm in a play, I'm trying to get a literary agent, I'm starting a new job, I'm studying for the PSAT and ACT, I'm looking at colleges...you know the deal) and that's why I've been posting less frequently than I did earlier in the summer. BUT I also want to promise you all that this fic is NOT going to

be over until you see a big, fat "THE END" typed at the bottom of the last chapter. I'm going to do my best to post at least once a month (but no promises) and hopefully finish it by the end of 2017 (again, no promises).

There are three main reasons I'm writing this: one, for writing practice; two, because I love Solangelo and have been wanting to write this since 2014; and three, you guys are so, so supportive of it--and I am infinitely thankful for that. Thank you all so much for sticking with me through this and I'm so glad you're enjoying it as much as I am!

Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

“Go ahead,” Nico replied, “but make it quick.”

Kayla snorted. “Fine, but it’s not like you’ve got anywhere else to go. Trust me, I’ve seen your ‘camp schedule.’ Will’s got a copy. I would be surprised if it got past Chiron, but everyone knows he’s a total softie for you.”

That raised more questions than it answered, but Nico didn’t bother asking any of them.

“Anyway,” she continued, “that’s not important right now. My real question: did Will clear you for shadow-traveling?”

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I'm so glad you are all having fun with this fic, so enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Nico. Hey. Come on, man, snap out of it.”

Percy sighed. “It’s no use, Jason. He’s not paying attention because he’s still all sad and mopey over his doctor leaving camp for the school year.”

“Still? Come on, Nico; if you miss Will that much, why don’t you just Iris-message him or something?”

Nico could, of course, hear them perfectly fine. He was always paying attention—sometimes too much, because he still noticed the whispered comments between other campers every time he strolled past. But he didn’t feel like responding. He got so bored these days that messing with his friends was the closest thing he had to fun. So, instead of responding to either of their comments, he took a bite of his grilled cheese and then stared at it as if it were a microscopic specimen.

“Like I said, man,” Percy grumbled. “It’s no use. He doesn’t love us anymore.”

Nico took one last bite of his sandwich, then tossed the crust onto Percy’s plate, stood, and walked out of the pavilion.

He wasn't really mad at Percy—it was hard to be, which was quite surprising considering the utter loathing he had harbored for him less than a year prior—or Jason, or anyone else. He was just fed up with himself. His underwhelming social skills. His unadulterated stupidity. His feelings.

He didn't aim for any particular location after he started walking, just moved. He needed to move, to stay on his feet as much as possible. Any time he sat still for too long, unoccupied, his brain ended up taking control.

His body he could trust. It was sturdy, fairly strong, always reliable. His athletic skill and high pain tolerance had saved his life on countless occasions. But his mind—his ridiculous ideas and intrusive, annoying thoughts that provided no help whatsoever? It was better off ignored.

So he let his legs carry him forward, forced his head to clear and allowed his feet to take him wherever they pleased. At this point, he couldn't find a reason to care.

And for some reason, moments later, he found himself standing in front of the archery range.

He never spent much time there. Archery wasn't his strongest skill; though he was still better than Will, he couldn't best Kayla and most of the other Apollo and Ares kids. Deciding to lay low here for a while and pretend to practice, he stepped forward, picked up a discarded bow and quiver, and notched an arrow, aiming for the center of a target. He breathed in on a count of three, out on four, drew back the string until it was taut—

“Hey! Nico!”

—and the arrow went flying, missing the target entirely and instead burrowing itself into the grass a few feet shy.

Nico turned and saw Kayla slinging her own bow over her shoulder and bounding toward him. She then glanced at where his shot had landed and laughed. “Oops. Sorry about that.”

Nico set down his bow and quiver and folded his arms—as more of an awkward what-should-I-do-with-my-hands habit than an aggressive move. “Uh, yeah. Do you need something?”

Kayla raised her hands in surrender. “Jeez, Grim Reaper, I’m only looking to chat. No need to recreate *The Walking Dead* on me.”

“It *is* tempting.”

She just rolled her eyes and gestured to a nearby bench. “Let’s sit down, shall we?”

Nico silently obliged, following her away from the range, and sat on the very end of the bench.

She, of course, chose to sit not on her own side, but directly next to him.

“You’re just like your brother,” he muttered.

“Which one?” Kayla asked, eyes twinkling. “Oh—is that supposed to be obvious?”

“Shut up or I’m not listening to you.”

“Well, now, that wouldn’t work so well, would it?” she asked. “Anyway, I’m not actually trying to annoy you that much, I promise. I really just wanted to ask you something.”

“Go ahead,” Nico replied, “but make it quick.”

Kayla snorted. “Fine, but it’s not like you’ve got anywhere else to go. Trust me, I’ve seen your ‘camp schedule.’ Will’s got a copy. I would be surprised it got past Chiron, but everyone knows he’s a total softie for you.”

That raised more questions than it answered, but Nico didn’t bother asking any of them.

“Anyway,” she continued, “that’s not important right now. My real question: did Will clear you for shadow-traveling?”

Nico wasn’t quite sure what he had been expecting, but it certainly wasn’t that. “What?”

Kayla sighed impatiently. “You heard me.”

“Yeah, I did, but why?”

She closed her eyes as if not seeing him could further prevent Nico from frustrating her. “Listen, di Angelo. I’m not your biggest fan, and I know you’re not mine. I don’t know how the hell my brother puts up with you, to be honest. But I’m *trying* to help you, here, and so I need you to just answer the goddamn question.”

Nico blinked. “Um. Okay. Well, yeah, he cleared me. Right before he left. So, like, a month ago.”

He could have given a more precise number, of course. He had been counting his days with Will and the days without him—which there had been thirty-four of, to be exact. Thirty-four days without Will Solace compared to the mere eighteen they had spent together.

Together. That made it sound special—and to Nico, it really was. Will had taken his preconceived ideas for the rest of the summer—for the rest of his life, really—grabbed them by their ankles, and tipped them upside down. Looking back on it now, even though it had only been less than two months since the end of the war, Nico was awestruck. He had been planning on *leaving Camp Half-Blood forever*. Suddenly, it hit him just how far he had actually come, how much progress he had made, all thanks to Will.

But, of course, life moves on. Will obviously had other obligations. Hell, Nico couldn’t even be considered an obligation. They were just regular friends, nothing as special as it was in his mind.

“Good,” Kayla said, interrupting his racing thoughts. “I don’t want the blame to fall on me if I send you off and you end up passing out in the middle of Kansas or something.”

Nico just stared at her. “What?”

She rolled her eyes. “Can’t you see where I’m going with this? Gods, you’re dense.” She then pulled a crumpled scrap of paper out of her back pocket, unfolded it, scanned it quickly, and held it out to him. When he didn’t take it from her, she dropped it onto his lap.

Nico stared at her messy handwriting, words and numbers that definitely spelled out an address. “What...is this?”

Kayla stood up then, running both hands through her hair like she wanted to yank it all out. “Nico di Angelo! This is the home address of Will Solace.” She talked slowly and softly, as if speaking to a kindergartner. “I want you to shadow-travel to this address, talk to my brother, and find out why in Hades he decided it was a good idea to keep it a secret from all his friends and siblings that he was actually going back to school after telling us all that he *wasn’t*.”

She ended with a melodramatic, overly-sweet smile and a batting of her eyelashes, and Nico could barely form a coherent sentence.

“He...what?”

“I know you heard me, di Angelo. But, yeah. He did that. And we don’t really know why, because he hasn’t picked up our Iris-messages. All he left us was a note saying he was sorry —no explanation.”

“But...why?”

Kayla simply shrugged. “I don’t know, really. None of us do.” She paused, and for once Nico saw a hint of real anxiety in her usually fierce and fearless eyes. “But we think he’ll talk to you. Like I said before...he really likes you. We’ve talked to Chiron, and he said even he doesn’t know why he’d do this. You’re...kind of our only hope.”

Nico didn’t even know how to comprehend everything he had just heard. Will didn’t seem like the person that would, out of the blue, up and leave his friends and family without explanation...did he?

Again, the fact that he had been friends (or something like that) with him for such a short time resurfaced in his mind. Did he even know Will at all?

He glanced again at Kayla—a girl who sometimes seemed braver and smarter than most adults, yet was still just a vulnerable, scared thirteen-year-old who was holding on to hope that her big brother was okay.

And he made his decision.

He took Kayla’s hand and squeezed it, praying that it provided some semblance of comfort. “I’ll do it.”

Chapter End Notes

Yay, new chapter (finally)! I have tech week for another show this week and I'm also starting work and dance, so I probably won't be posting again for a little while--maybe two weeks. We'll see. But the next chapter is one that I have been DYING to write, so I might just try to whip it together tonight and tomorrow since I have a long break between morning classes and work...stay tuned :)

Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Nico wished he could have captured the moment in a photograph—or a video, or a drawing (he'd have to ask Hazel), or something. Will's face was priceless.

Chapter Notes

I fiNALLY FINISHED THIS ENJOY

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

25 Summer Drive, Austin, Texas

Keeping the address in his mind, Nico carefully refolded the paper, placed it in his pocket, stepped into the late afternoon shadow casted behind his cabin, and closed his eyes.

When he opened them again, he was in front of a house.

It was stout, just one story, but painted a nice shade of icy blue that reminded him of a summer sky. The front door was open invitingly, just a simple glass storm door covering the entryway. The front steps were dark bluestone, a flattering complement to the color of the house, and the lawn grew bright green and was neatly trimmed. A small flower garden laid nestled between the driveway, the front of the house, and a miniature white picket fence, the icing on the cake of this picture-perfect American home.

And Nico, standing on the sidewalk, was terrified to walk up to the door.

This is Will, he told himself. It's just Will.

Except it was never “just” Will. He meant so much more to Nico than just another person.

And that's why I have to do this.

He stepped forward, placing one foot in front of the other until he was on the top step and his hand was poised above the doorbell.

I can ring it. I can do this. I can—

Just then a figure entered his vision, someone walking past the doorway, carrying a basket of laundry. A shorter woman with wavy blonde hair pulled into a ponytail. Nico's nerves rushed into overdrive, practically shouting *please don't see me please don't see me please don't see me* until she paused and stared, most definitely seeing him.

He stepped back as she opened the door.

"Hello, can I help you?"

Nico tried his hardest to hold eye contact. She was smiling—that had to be a good sign, right? "Um, hi, are you...uh..."

"Will's mother?" she asked, and he quickly nodded. "Yep. You're in the right place." She then glanced him up and down and grinned. "And you must be Nico."

"What?" he asked automatically. "I mean...how did you know?"

She pushed the door open wider and gestured for him to step inside. "Will's been talking about you quite a bit. Come on in."

"I, uh...thank you," Nico mumbled, stepping into the foyer. Immediately, he glanced around—it wasn't a particularly large area, but it was far from cramped. The walls were painted a soft white that he'd almost call cream (if he cared that much about colors) and the various windows let in enough light from all directions that he knew he wouldn't be able to shadow-travel out of there if he tried.

If he had to describe it in word word, it would be...bright. Which, coincidentally, is the same way he'd describe Will.

The woman—Ms. Solace, he supposed—closed the door behind him, set down her laundry basket, and then walked past him into what appeared to be the kitchen, beckoning him to follow. He did, glancing around at the mostly-bare walls, and when he turned to face the dining table, he had to swallow down an embarrassing squeak.

There he was, bent over a laptop, a half-eaten apple in one hand and a pen raised over a notebook in the other.

"Hey, Mom," he greeted without casting even a single upward glance. "Were you just talking to someone?"

Ms. Solace cleared her throat, and he raised his head.

Nico wished he could have captured the moment in a photograph—or a video, or a drawing (he'd have to ask Hazel), or something. Will's face was priceless.

And he didn't even say a word. Just stared for a moment, jaw agape, and then stood, rushed over, and wrapped Nico in the most ferocious hug he'd ever seen.

The butterflies rose in his stomach, of course, but they weren't really the anxious kind. Will was warm—so warm—and he smelled like apples and cinnamon and everything good in the

world and if he could Nico would just stay here forever and ever and never let go even if the world was falling to pieces around them and—

Will pulled back just enough for them to face each other, his hands resting on Nico's forearms. "You have no idea how much I've missed you."

Ms. Solace coughed softly from the corner, but Nico didn't really notice. "I'll leave you two alone, then.

Will, honey, I'm probably going to be taking a nap if you need anything."

Nico smirked despite the way his heart was pounding. "A lot, I hope."

He was expecting some kind of witty response, but Will instead fell back, scratching the back of his neck. Nico all but physically sighed at the loss of touch (which his past self would die if he heard, but his present self didn't give a shit about anything anymore) and was so, *so* tempted to grab him by the sleeve of his flannel and pull him closer again, but he allowed Will a small bubble of space.

"I..." He dropped his arm with a sigh. "I'm so sorry, Nico."

Nico swallowed. He definitely hadn't prepared enough for this. "It's okay," he replied quickly. "You don't have to—"

"No," Will interrupted, "I do have to. It was stupid of me to think that I could just run away and hope no one would follow. And it was stupid to not explain why. Why I didn't tell anyone I was leaving, why I was avoiding you...all of it."

Nico fiddled with his ring. "Are you...going to explain?"

After a beat of hesitation, Will nodded. "Yeah. I owe it to you, and to Kayla and Austin and everybody." He glanced up again, eyes wide. "Are they doing alright?"

"Yeah, they're fine."

He shook his head. "I'm still so worried, though, that they won't be able to handle it...Never mind. I'll explain everything in just a..." He trailed off, staring at something across the room, and Nico turned to follow his gaze.

The window. The sun was setting, casting a pale orange glow about the kitchen.

"Nico, do you know what day it is?"

He paused for a moment, just so it wasn't outright obvious how he'd been counting the days as of late. "Uh...September twenty-first."

Then Will smiled, and in the warm, soft lighting, his features slightly shadowed, the way his cheeks rose and eyes gazed right into his own propelled his heart to start beating just a little faster. "The last day of summer."

He then, of course, had to go and ruin the moment. “Will, summer ended ages ago. All the part-timers have been out of camp and back in school for weeks.” (The slight exception to that statement, of course, was Percy’s weekend visits.)

Will put his hands on his hips and raised his eyebrows. “Actually, according to my very scientific calculations...or Google search...the autumnal equinox is *tomorrow*. Which means today is the last day of summer.”

“The day is already over.”

He huffed. “And that is my *exact* point, Nico di Angelo.” Will then reached out and took his hand, and thankfully he kept talking, because Nico wasn’t sure he would have been able to produce even an excusatory cough. “Come on; follow me. I’m still going to tell you everything, but let’s do it somewhere nicer.”

Will began to walk, pulling him along, and he managed to follow with tripping and falling on his face.

“Your kitchen is nice,” he blurted as they headed toward the back door.

Will turned back for a quick moment and flashed him a grin. “Thanks, though you should tell that to my mom. She’s the one who painted it and designed it and everything.”

Nico nodded courteously. He wasn’t really all that interested in striking up a conversation with Ms. Solace, despite how nice she had seemed earlier. He just wasn’t a talking-to-friends’-parents sort of person. He was bound to make a bad impression, and he didn’t want that to happen just yet while he was still enjoying his time with Will.

Will led him through a living room, out a back door, and onto a small deck. The rapidly chilling air raised goosebumps on his arms, but a warm breeze flitted past as well, providing a nice balance.

“Out here?” Nico asked.

Will smiled. “Not quite.” He then dropped Nico’s hand, ran down the steps of the deck, and headed toward a small wooden shed at the edge of the yard, backed by woods. “I’ll be right back!” he shouted.

Nico just folded his arms and waited as he entered the shed and closed the creaky door behind himself, not even bothering to ponder what in Hades was going on. He had learned already to never question what Will might be up to, because he always had a plan.

And sometimes those were crazy ones, he added as Will emerged, just moments later, carrying a full-size step ladder under one arm.

“What the fuck?” was all he could ask as Will struggled to re-climb the two short stairs.

“Language,” he warned, before finally propping the ladder up against the side of his house and heaving a huge sigh. “Phew. That was, ah...heavier than I expected. But it’s all good.”

“I could’ve helped you. Uh, even though I have no idea what you’re doing.”

Will shook his head. “Nah.” He then motioned to the ladder like an usher. “After you, gentleman.”

“What?”

He grinned, gesturing up again. “Come on. Let’s climb.”

“To *where*? ”

Will rolled his eyes then, leaning back against the ladder and resigning his hands to his sides. “Nico di Angelo,” he sighed. “We have spent quite a few of our summer nights sitting on the rooftop of your cabin, just talking, and might I say—they were some of the best.” He then lifted his head, looking up at to the top of his house, and Nico mimicked his gaze. “So I just thought I’d continue the tradition.”

Nico paused for a moment, taking in his words. The last night of summer.

Some of the best. He couldn’t help but agree.

And so he broke into a smile, entirely unable to keep it off his face—though he didn’t try so hard this time—and reached for the first rung of the ladder.

“Meet you at the top, Solace.”

Chapter End Notes

Cinema Sins voice rooooooll credits!

see this is the kind of reunion we need for No.6

as always, thank you all so much for the comments & kudos; every single one means a lot to me (especially the comments)! the fact that you guys are enjoying this so much makes me want to write it all the more, so keep it up :) looking at my calendar, chapter 26 *could* happen this weekend but probably won’t. it’s more likely to be here next Tuesday when I have a break between classes and work, but that depends on how much homework I have, so again, no promises...but I will try!

Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

“You—you didn’t have to,” Will choked out.

Nico gently massaged his back. “I needed to make sure you were okay.”

A sob racked Will’s frame, and he seemed to shrink in his arms. Nico waited for him to respond, but he didn’t.

“Are you?” he asked.

Chapter Notes

I'M NOT DEAD I PROMISE

This took ages because I've been how busy I've been (see the end notes for why; it's exciting I promise!!), but I hope you all enjoy it. :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Once they were settled, Will cleared his throat.

“So.”

“So,” Nico echoed. “I didn’t really want to say this, but...I’m a little mad at you.”

He wasn’t really expecting a backlash, but he certainly wasn’t expecting Will to simply nod, his head bowed and hands folded on his lap. “I know. I deserve that.”

“Well—”

“Nico.” Will turned to him. “There’s no arguing it, really. It was a dick move.” He sighed. “I’ve been planning it since June, though. To come back here. I never used to—I was always a year-round camper. But then my mom called earlier this spring, and she told me about this thing—a pre-med program through this state college that I could start while I’m still in high school.”

Nico wasn’t quite sure what that meant, but it sounded prestigious, so he voiced that.

Will laughed dryly. “Yeah, I guess. It really just means a lot of money and a lot of homework, though. But I told her...I told her I’d think about it. And then I did, and then I decided to apply because, really, it’s such a great opportunity, but then after I got accepted I thought about camp—my siblings and the infirmary. My friends. And I realized how much of an asshole I’d be if I left them all year, you know?”

“You’re not—it’s not—”

“No,” Will cut him off, shaking his head. “It is. The infirmary is my responsibility. To just leave it like that...it’s the worst thing I’ve ever done. And I felt so goddamn guilty about it that I decided to just not tell them I was going to leave.” He sniffed, and Nico noticed his eyes were a little misty. “The only person I told was Chiron, and I told him not to tell my siblings, because—because I didn’t want to see their faces. Their reactions. I didn’t want to see them upset right before I left, because I thought it might stop me, and it’s so fucking selfish but I didn’t *want* to be stopped—”

“Will.” In a moment of bravery, Nico grabbed his trembling hand, squeezing it tightly in an attempt to stop it from shaking. “It’s okay.”

Will sniffled again, but didn’t pull away. “Chiron warned me, you know,” he said, almost a whisper. “He told me that someone—whether it be Kayla, Austin, Cecil, Lou Ellen, or you—would come chasing after me. I...I hadn’t believed him, though. I didn’t think anyone would want to.”

Nico began to absentmindedly run his thumb across Will’s fingers. “What do you mean? Of course we wanted to. We *all* wanted to. Kayla was the one who gave me your address and convince me to do this.”

That’s when the first real tears began to fall. Just like the first (and second) time Nico had seen Will cry, he panicked a little—but less so, because now he at least had some semblance of an idea of what he should do. He let go of Will’s hand and instead wrapped both arms around his trembling shoulders, pulling him closer even if it was a little awkward and difficult while sitting on a gabled roof.

“You—you didn’t have to,” Will choked out.

Nico gently massaged his back. “I needed to make sure you were okay.”

A sob racked Will’s frame, and he seemed to shrink in his arms. Nico waited for him to respond, but he didn’t.

“Are you?” he asked. “Okay, I mean.”

After a moment, Will shook his head, the some of his hair brushing back and forth against Nico’s neck. He let out a shuddering sigh and then inhaled just as shakily. “School is not the only reason I came home.”

When he went silent again, Nico rubbed circles into his back, encouraging him to continue.

He took another weak breath. “My mom was diagnosed with cancer two months ago.”

And to that, Nico had no idea how to respond. His hands froze in place. He wondered if he should back away, or if that was insensitive, or if it was a good idea to give Will some space

“I wanted to heal her,” Will continued, and the bitterness in his voice was easily detectable but there were no signs of more tears. Perhaps he had run his eyes dry. “But when I got home, she said no before I could even ask. I told her she was crazy. She said that she had talked to Apollo—Apollo, my dad who never talks to me—and asked him about it. He said that I would overexert myself trying to heal something as serious as she has. That I would die. And that he can’t do it himself because it’s against his *stupid* godly code of conduct or something. They’re not supposed to save mortals’ lives, apparently. She’s been going to a doctor and getting treatment, but I just keep thinking...” Will finally pulled back, staying close to Nico but no longer leaning against him. He stared at his open palms. “I’m sorry. You don’t need to keep listening to me rant.”

“No,” Nico replied, tempted but too nervous to take his hands again. “It’s nothing to apologize for. You’re scared and frustrated and have every right to be.”

Will clenched his fists, and he wondered if they were buzzing with energy—healing magic that he wasn’t allowed to put to use. “I just don’t know what to do.”

“She’ll get better,” Nico said. “I know she will.”

Will’s eyes met his own. “You can’t possibly know that. How the hell do you...” He trailed off, and his hands went limp. “Oh. You *would* know, wouldn’t you?”

Nico nodded. “Yeah. I can sense when someone’s on the verge of death, Will. All I have to do is be physically close to them. And your mother? She’s not. I promise. I could sense how alive she was the moment she invited me into this house.”

For a moment, Will just stared at him, and Nico wondered if he had said something wrong. Had he crossed a line, talking about death so casually? Was Will angry for not asking him about his mother sooner?

But then he smiled. “We’re not as different as you think we are, you know.”

Nico blinked. “What?”

Will leaned closer and took one of his hands, lacing their fingers together and holding on with steadfast resolution. “You and me. We’re like two sides of the same coin. Death and healing are both parts of the same trade.”

“Will, I really don’t know what you mean.”

He grinned, and it didn’t have his usual sheen of snark or teasing; rather, it was aglow with something remarkably different. “Just think about it. I can sense everything that’s going wrong inside of someone’s body. You can tell whether or not they’re going to die from it.” He

squeezed Nico's hand even tighter. "We're, like, a dream team. If we could work together, we could *save lives*."

Nico averted his gaze. "But you already do that perfectly fine without me," he replied quietly. "And I've never saved anyone's life before. That's not what I'm good at."

The air went cold and silent, and Nico wished the wind would come back and blow him off the fucking roof. Obviously, moments ago, Will had been feeling excited about something after months of being downtrodden and depressed, and Nico had just gone and squashed it all because he was a goddamn *moron* with no hope for improvement and—

Suddenly he felt a warm touch under his chin, gently lifting his head. He didn't resist against it, no matter how much he wanted to. He couldn't. Around Will, he might as well be a mug of microwaved butter.

"That's not true, Nico. You saved the *entire world* this summer."

"That was with a lot of help. It wasn't just me."

"But you saved mine by yourself, idiot. You saw how I was after Maria—after she was gone. Do you know how much worse shape I would have been in if you hadn't been there?"
Nico couldn't form the words to respond—not with Will still holding his face. Fortunately, he didn't need to—Will kept talking.

"That's why I probably seemed like I was always overworking myself, even though I promise I wasn't. I can handle it. I had to make up for what happened to Maria, and me ditching camp to come here." He didn't move, gaze unwavering. The sun was beginning to sink beneath the trees, and the orange light made his hair glow the same color as the magical Camp Half-Blood bonfire when everyone was feeling happy. "I really wouldn't have been able to keep going without you."

His words hit Nico like a rogue pegasus stampede. "I...uh..."

Will smiled, and he looked nothing short of perfect. "I wish you would like yourself as much as I like you."

Like, Nico's brain pondered, filtering it through like thick molasses. He was pretty sure he was completely malfunctioning. *That's a funny word.*

He'd let it mean whatever it could mean.

Then, suddenly—thankfully, before he did anything stupid—Will cleared his throat and let his hand fall away. "So! Have you eaten anything today?"

He somehow managed to nod and form some syllabus. "Uh, yeah. Sandwich. For lunch."

Will nodded. "Good. What do you say to some dinner? Since my mom's probably resting and last time I tried to cook something I created a thunderstorm in the microwave, we can order a pizza. Maybe watch a movie with it, catch you up on all that important pop culture you've missed. And I'm not going to shut up, so you should say something."

Nico couldn't help smiling a little. "That sounds great to me."

Chapter End Notes

woohoo now that that's over with I have an exciting announcement!

Some of you who actually pay attention to what I write down here may have noticed that I've mentioned directing a show a few times. Well, guess what? That show was a Percy Jackson musical adaptation that I spent over a year writing, composing, directing, and producing! My cast is an AMAZING group of my friends and acquaintances who agreed to do this with me even when it was in a disastrous phase and spent only three months once a week rehearsing this full-length show. My mom, being awesome, rented a venue for it; we gave out free tickets to friends and family of the cast and had an awesome one-night-only performance!

And best of all, I set up a camera, so you can view the video here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?
v=PUWL5p8bVzU&list=PLDgYzaWkCm7fMovEj6NH5eEc07QCOv4QP](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUWL5p8bVzU&list=PLDgYzaWkCm7fMovEj6NH5eEc07QCOv4QP)

(since the link isn't clickable, you'll have to copy and paste it)

Thanks again to everyone who is sticking with me throughout this story! Now that the show's over (sad but relieving) I'll have more time to write...hopefully (I'm still taking 9 classes and have exhausting rehearsals and a new tutoring job three days a week). Talk to you all again soon!

Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

“Um, so...” He trailed off. “I don’t really know how to put this nicely.”

Will’s face fell.

“Wait!” he yelped. “It’s nothing, um, bad about you. I promise. I’m not—that’s not what I was going to say. I—you—you’re a great friend, Will. You didn’t do anything wrong.” He could feel the blood rushing into his cheeks. “It’s, uh, about me, actually.”

“Okay?”

He cleared his throat. “Yeah. So, uh, have you ever heard people talking about me?”

Chapter Notes

I had this done last night and forgot to post it...oops...enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Nico stood rather awkwardly by the kitchen table while Will ordered a large cheese pizza and an order of cinnamon sticks.

“Yes that’s delivery,” he said for the third time. “Okay. Thank you. Have a nice day. You too. Bye.” He hung up the phone and faced Nico. “Should be here in about forty minutes. In the meantime,” he said, spreading his hands, “is there anything I can get you? Water? A sweatshirt? You look like you’re going to freeze.”

“Will, we’re inside your house.”

Will frowned. “Still. The AC is turned up pretty high. Should I—”

“Will,” Nico cut in. “I’m fine.”

“Oh.” He turned a little red. “Okay.”

Nico twisted the ring on his finger. “There’s actually something else I wanted to talk to you about.”

Will’s eyes widened. “Oh?” His expression was strangely unreadable.

“Yeah,” Nico said. “Um, so...” He trailed off. “I don’t really know how to put this nicely.”

Will’s face fell.

“Wait!” he yelped. “It’s nothing, um, bad about you. I promise. I’m not—that’s not what I was going to say. I—you—you’re a great friend, Will. You didn’t do anything wrong.” He could feel the blood rushing into his cheeks. “It’s, uh, about me, actually.”

“Okay?”

He cleared his throat. “Yeah. So, uh, have you ever heard people talking about me?”

Will frowned. “Well, yeah, of course. Kayla calls you stupid zombie-related names all the time and asks how you’re doing, Austin keeps telling me that I need to catch you up on music, Jason came up to me once and—” He cut himself off, glancing at the floor and drumming his fingers on the island that separated them. “Um, anyway, yeah. All good things, though.”

“Oh,” Nico replied. “Well, uh, on my end of things, it hasn’t always been...like that.” He swallowed. “People say things about me behind my back. Always have, ever since I got to camp. They call me weird, they call me creepy, they call me scary, whatever. I don’t give a shit about any of it.”

Will blinked. “I’ve never heard anybody say that. Well, besides Drew once, maybe, but she just thought you could do better without the whole goth-punk-homeless look you’ve got going on. She wasn’t, like...mean, or anything. No one ever has been.”

Nico shook his head. “Unfortunately, that’s not true. Everybody talks about me; you just haven’t heard it yet. But that’s not my point.” He sat down on one of the barstools, worried that his knees were going to give way underneath him if they kept trembling so much. “What I’m trying to tell you is that it’s about you now. Now when people are talking about me, they’re bringing you into it, asking why in Hades such a cheery sunshine-and-rainbows kind of guy like you would ever want to hang out with someone like *me*.”

Will went completely silent, his face inscrutable.

Nico sighed. At least now he had sort of released the words he’d been cooping up for so long. “I just want you to know that this is what you’re getting yourself into if you want to be friends with me. It’s not going to be good for you.” He hesitated when Will still didn’t move a muscle. “I just thought you deserved to know.”

For a painful thirty seconds, Will was silent. But when he finally spoke up, his voice was as heavy and cold as a glacier cutting across a valley.

“Who?”

“What?”

“Who, Nico? Who said that?”

Nico hesitated. “I—I don’t know, exactly. I’ve just heard the whispers, seen people looking at us funny when we walk by. I thought it was all obvious what they think of us, really.”

Will then closed his eyes and let out a long sigh without opening his mouth again for a few moments. Nico wondered whether he was about to cry, or scream, or maybe both.

But he didn’t. He spoke very calmly, in fact.

“Nico,” he began, eyes still shut. “I need you to listen to me very closely.”

Nico nodded, then realized Will couldn’t see that, and uttered a tiny “okay.”

“Those *people*—whoever you’re even talking about—are not saying what you think they’re saying. It’s not even close. I can personally guarantee that.”

Nico crossed his arms. “And why am I supposed to believe that?”

Will finally opened his eyes again, but slowly enough to show that he really would have preferred to not. “Just trust me.”

“I can’t if you don’t give me good reason to, Will. If they’re not talking shit about you for being friends with me, and vice versa, then what in Hades are they whispering about?”

He shook his head. “I can’t tell you.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s stupid. It’s just a stupid thing and it’s completely about me. It’s not you at all.”

“I don’t believe that for a second. They started doing it even more after you left! I’m telling you, they—” He was interrupted by Will all but physically leaping over the counter to grab both of his hands in one of his own and clasp them tightly together.

“What if I swear on the Styx? Will that make you believe me? Because I do. I swear on the River Styx that this has nothing to do with them thinking you’re undeserving of being my friend or whatever you said. I swear that it isn’t going to affect what I think of you *at all* and that it’s nothing for you to be concerned about. Got it?”

Thunder rumbled in the distance.

Nico’s hands were going a little numb, but he couldn’t be bothered to mind. “I...got it,” he replied quietly.

After an awkward silence, Will pulled his hands back like Nico’s were made of toxic waste. “So, uh...pizza should be here in a half hour or so.”

Nico nodded rapidly, returning to his previous position on the barstool. “Uh, yeah. Yeah. And cinnamon sticks, whatever those are.”

Will’s jaw dropped. “You’ve never had cinnamon sticks?”

He was purposely acting melodramatic and he knew it, of course, but it was fun, especially after whatever *that* conversation was.

Nico shrugged, going along with it. “Never. Are they a *passing fad* like fidget spinners and One Direction, or *iconic* like *High School Musical* and *Mean Girls* or whatever?”

Will gasped and held both hands to his heart. “Nico! I am *so* proud of you. You’re catching on to pop culture so well. And who do I have to thank for showing you those movies?”

“Jason and Piper. They’ve got a good stash in the Aphrodite cabin. I watched both of those just last week.”

Will nodded approvingly. “Good to know. Well, cinnamon sticks would fall into the *iconic* category for sure. Just wait until you try them. The dough is like biting into a cloud, and the sauce is like liquid heaven—” He was cut off by a loud buzzing noise coming from the front part of the house. “The doorbell? The pizza guy wouldn’t be here already, would he?”

He ran out of the room, leaving Nico with no real choice but to follow. When he arrived in the foyer, Will had already opened the door, and someone was stepping through.

“Aunt Lindsey!” Will exclaimed. “Hi! I thought you were the pizza guy.”

The woman was tall and thin, her black hair pulled back messily with a clip. She took off a dark leather jacket and then threw her arms around Will.

“What, the cute one?”

When Will pulled away, his cheeks were red. “No! I mean...anyway.” He stepped back and gestured. “This is my friend Nico.”

Nico waved awkwardly, but the woman—Aunt Lindsey—grinned at him—a huge, friendly smile that he instantly recognized. “Hi, Nico. I’ve heard a few things about you.”

Nico looked to Will. “Really?”

Will was getting more and more flustered by the second. “I’ve just...mentioned you once or twice.”

“Yeah, once or twice,” Aunt Lindsey repeated, still grinning. “I won’t bother you two anymore, though. Where’s your mom, Will? I’m here to check on her.”

“Upstairs sleeping.”

She nodded. “Alright. I’ll at least give her this, then.” She held up a small gift bag that Nico hadn’t noticed before. “Just a little something I thought she’d like from the boutique down the road. Catch you later, Will. Say hi to the pizza guy for me.” After a quick wink, to which Will groaned miserably, she headed quietly up the stairs.

Will then turned to Nico. “Sorry. She’s annoying.”

Nico smiled. "She seems great." He hesitated. "And your mom seems great. And your house is great. This is all really...great."

Will gave a soft smile in return. "Thanks. Actually...thanks for even just being here, Nico. I've been—well, I've been kind of lonely, to be honest. I don't really have any friends here, so it's nice to get to hang out with you."

Nico shrugged, though his mind was running a mile a minute. "I'm glad I'm here, too. I don't have a whole lot of friends, either."

Will raised his eyebrows. "That's a lie and you know it." Then he paused for a moment, his expression fading into something more unsure. "I, uh, was just wondering—how long are you planning on staying here?"

"Oh," Nico replied. "I, um, didn't even think of that. I'm so sorry. I literally just invited myself, didn't I? Oh gods, I'm such an—"

"No, no!" Will cut in. "No, Nico, you're welcome to stay for however long you want. I was just wondering...what that might be."

Nico considered this. He could play hard-to-get, stick to his aloof, loner facade he usually wore—but he also could have a great time with a great person for a few days, or even a week.

Or eternity, his brain whispered.

Shut up, he replied.

Eventually, he collected himself enough to spread his hands and speak. "How about we wait and see?"

Thank the gods; Will smiled. "Sounds good to me."

Chapter End Notes

Hey, if you haven't yet, you should check out the Percy Jackson musical I wrote and directed:

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?
list=PLDgYzaWkCm7fMovEj6NH5eEc07QCOv4QP](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDgYzaWkCm7fMovEj6NH5eEc07QCOv4QP)

Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

“So you’re trying to tell me that Snape’s not the bad guy?”

“I’m trying to tell you to wait and see.”

Nico rolled his eyes. “It’s obvious. Just look at him. Dark, long hair, always wearing black, never smiling—he’s the epitome of evil.”

Will laughed. “You should get into the habit of thinking before you speak.”

Chapter Notes

hey look at me, actually updating within a week (barely) like I said I would! enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The pizza arrived shortly afterwards, which was fortunate considering Nico had no idea how to continue the conversation from there.

It was delivered by an older woman—he definitely didn’t heave a sigh of relief when he saw her—and Will quickly tipped her and then brought the boxes to the counter.

Nico took a seat at one of the barstools. He didn’t *want* to wonder if perhaps when Will’s aunt had referred to the usual delivery guy as “cute” that she had meant in his eyes instead of hers, but he was definitely hoping that was the case. And also sort of not hoping, because that would make him kind of jealous. But hoping because that would mean Will liked boys. And that would mean that Will could like him. But that was highly unlikely.

“So these are the cinnamon sticks?” Nico decided that was a smooth enough segue. He pulled open the box and took a peek, only for Will’s hand to bat his away.

“No dessert until we finish dinner!” he scolded, though he was quite obviously grinning.
“Doctor’s orders.”

Nico rolled his eyes. “I think we can agree that these are both equally unhealthy.”

Will sighed dramatically. “Perhaps. But we have to honor tradition.” He then pulled open the pizza box and handed Nico a paper plate from the stack they had been given. “Here, take a few slices and then we’ll find something on TV.”

Nico wasn't feeling particularly hungry—the pains in his stomach were definitely caused by nerves—so he just grabbed one and then followed Will into his living room.

They sat side-by-side on the couch, Will practically throwing himself down onto it with a huge sigh and Nico staying awkwardly perched on the edge, retaining a respectable distance between them. However, as Will turned on the TV and began flipping through channels, providing detailed commentary such as *ew, this is trash*, and *why is there never anything decent on these days*, he began to relax a little, sinking into his seat and nibbling at the crust of his pizza slice.

Eventually, Will seemed satisfied with a movie he had found and he tossed the remote onto an ottoman, sinking even further back into the couch and picking up his pizza.

"Damn, it's been a while since I've seen *The Sorcerer's Stone*," he muttered.

"The what?"

Will turned and stared at him. "*The Sorcerer's Stone*. This movie. Harry Potter."

"Harry Potter. I know I've heard that name before."

Nico was surprised Will didn't fall onto the floor with how quickly he sat up. "What?" he exclaimed through a mouthful. "Are you telling me you've never seen Harry Potter? Or read the books?"

Nico's hands fidgeted nervously. "Uh, yeah. I guess."

Will huffed and turned back to the TV again. "Well, Nico, I'm glad we have this opportunity today. Because seeing all eight Harry Potter movies at least once in your life is a *necessity*."

"Eight?"

He rolled his eyes. "Yes, eight. Now shut up and watch the movie."

Nico obliged, not even noticing the fact that Will had maybe moved a tiny bit closer.

"So you're trying to tell me that Snape's *not* the bad guy?"

"I'm trying to tell you to wait and see."

Nico rolled his eyes. "It's obvious. Just look at him. Dark, long hair, always wearing black, never smiling—he's the epitome of evil."

Will laughed. "You should get into the habit of thinking before you speak."

"Oh, shut up. I'm trying to listen to Hermione."

At some point during the past hour, Aunt Audrey had come downstairs, said a quick goodbye, and headed out. Also, they had finished all the pizza. And the cinnamon sticks. And they were almost sitting on the same section of the couch—Nico wasn’t quite sure how that had happened, but it had. Will was so close to him that he could feel the heat radiating off of his skin and hear his every breath. His breathing growing slow and heavy, and after a quick glance (definitely the first one Nico had cast in more than ten minutes, totally) he noticed that he was blinking more frequently than usual, too.

“Hey,” he said softly. “Don’t fall asleep on me.”

Will shook his head. “I’m not tired.” And then he yawned, and Nico raised his eyebrows. “Okay, maybe a little. Just a little. I’m gonna be fine; this is my favorite movie.”

Fifteen minutes later, it was evident that Will was not fine when Nico felt a sudden warm pressure on his shoulder and a long exhale tickled his neck.

He knew that if he turned to look, his heart rate would increase tenfold, and that might cause him to jump and/or push Will off of himself, which he didn’t really want to do. Will resting against his shoulder was like having a kitten sitting on his lap—if he made one slight movement, he could end it altogether. So he stayed facing the TV, accepting the fact that his heart was long-lost and would likely never be returned.

Warm. Everything around him was warm.

“Nico,” a voice whispered. “Nico, are you awake?”

Wow, this is a really nice dream, Nico thought, snuggling closer to the source, his eyes still closed. *It feels so real...*

He heard a soft chuckle. “Wow, you really are a different person in the morning.”

Nico’s eyes shot open. There was only one person who could use that kind of snark against him and get away with it.

Once his eyes locked with Will’s, he practically flung himself backward off the couch. He would have fallen if not for Will grabbing his wrist.

“Hey,” he said. “Uh, no need to panic.”

But Nico was panicking. “I should go.”

Will shook his head rapidly, attempting to pull him closer. “No. I mean—you shouldn’t. Like, come back. I’m still sleepy.”

Nico stared at him, incredulous. “What?”

“Come on; I was so warm before, and now I’m freezing.”

“What?”

“You’re like my personal space heater, Nico. Come on.”

Nico blinked. “Will, are you even awake?”

Will rolled his eyes. “Of course I’m awake. I’m talking to you.”

“Yeah, but you’re not making any sense.”

He still didn’t let go of his wrist. “I’m just saying that it was nice being all cozy with you, and now you’re rudely abandoning me and leaving me to suffer in the cold.”

“It’s like seventy degrees in here, and *you’re* the warm one!” Nico spluttered, though there was definitely heat in his face, at least. He was sure that it was turning pink. He needed to think of an excuse, and make it quick. “And I, uh, am hungry. That’s why I’m up. I’m hungry. We should have breakfast.”

Will considered this for a moment and then shrugged, finally dropping his hand. “Sure, I guess. I’m pretty hungry, too.” He paused in thought for a few seconds. “French toast?”

Nico nodded. “French toast.”

Will smirked. “Maybe French toast will be our always.”

“What?”

“Never mind.” He cracked his fingers and stood up from the couch. “Let’s make breakfast.”

As Will headed into the kitchen and Nico watched him walk away, just about ready to stand and follow him, it hit him what had just happened—and he had to grab the nearest pillow, bury his face in it, and silently scream.

...I just slept through the entire night cuddling on a couch with Will Solace.

“Hey, get out here!” he called from the kitchen. “Unless you help me, you’re not getting any breakfast, because I have no idea what I’m doing.”

What a life I’m living.

Chapter End Notes

I really have no idea when the next chapter’s gonna make it out. Hopefully in about a week again. I’ve got LOADS of ideas (probably too many), so it’s just a matter of actually writing them well. Thanks again for all the kudos and supportive comments!!

Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Nico stared at its cover. “Italian level one?”

Will slid into the seat next to him, scratching the back of his head. “Yeah, I dropped Spanish for it this year. I thought it would, uh, be more interesting, or something.” He sighed, opening the book and flipping through the glossy pages. “Turns out it’s just difficult.”

Nico watched as he scanned each new chapter title, searching for something. “You do know that I speak Italian, right?”

Chapter Notes

This one is LONG; you're welcome

(This is mainly due to the fact that I couldn't figure out a logical place to end it)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Nico stood to the side of the stove as Will flipped four pieces of sort-of-burned French toast.

“Not bad,” he commented. “They smell good, at least. Hopefully you won’t poison us.”

“Hey, watch it,” Will replied. “This toast is my pride and joy.”

Watching him cook from this angle with fresh morning sunlight streaming through the window for some reason recalled Nico’s memories of that night they had spent together alone in the infirmary. Will’s skin looked so soft, his smile so relaxed, just as it had that night once he had fallen asleep. Nico was tempted to a dangerous degree to kiss his cheek again—this time, while he was actually awake to respond to it.

Thankfully, before he turned into a blushing mess, the thought of the infirmary reminded him of something much more important.

“Hey,” he said. “I promised Kayla that I’d let her know what was going on.” He immediately regretted letting that bomb drop so soon, as it immediately wiped away the expression that he had so admired, but he continued as familiar words echoed through his head. *You’ve kept every promise you’ve ever made.* “Come on, Will. We need to Iris-message them.”

Will hesitated for a moment before sighing and lifting the finished French toast off of the pan with his spatula. “Fine. I’ve got a crystal in my room we can use.”

Nico normally would have been ecstatic to be sitting on Will’s bed with him eating homemade breakfast, but Kayla’s angry shouting kind of ruined the mood.

“You *idiot!* We would have been perfectly fine with you going back to school if you would have just *told* us! I cannot *believe* you! You better call back again when everybody else is here in the cabin. They all want to see you so badly. They won’t shut up about you; it’s so *annoying*.”

A few times throughout the message, Austin pushed her out of view for a moment and chimed in. “But we love you and are so proud of you taking this opportunity.” And based on her smile, Nico was pretty sure Kayla felt the same way.

“Kayla,” Will interrupted at one point, “are you sure you guys can handle the infirmary on your own? Because if it’s too hard, I can come back. It’s not a big deal.”

Kayla looked like she wanted to punch him through the rainbow mist. “Shut up. We’re a lot stronger than you think, idiot.”

“I’m not so sure about that,” Austin piped up from the background. “I couldn’t even come *close* to hitting the little kids’ target in archery today.”

Kayla rolled her eyes. “*Strong-willed*, at least, then. And you know what they say—where there’s a will, there’s a way.”

“But you don’t have Will,” Nico said. “He’s right here.”

It took her a moment to process this—though Will started cackling immediately—and then she swiped her hand violently through the Iris-message, dissipating it and cutting off Austin’s cheery good-bye.

Will was still laughing by the time it was gone. “Good one, Nico. Didn’t know you had it in you.”

Nico shrugged. “I guess you’ve been rubbing off on me.”

Will chuckled again. “Good to know.” He then picked up the last bit of French toast from his plate, ate it, and put Nico’s empty plate on top of his own. “So, I’ve got a little bit of homework to get done today, but maybe afterwards we can do something fun?”

It seemed like more of a desperate hope than a suggestion.

Nico considered this. He *could* go back to camp and not have to worry about anything—embarrassing himself in front of Will, accidentally acting upon his feelings toward Will, lashing out against Will when his inevitable self-loathing kicks in—but this was also possibly

his only chance in the next nine months to spend any time with Will. Time *alone* with Will. Just the two of them.

So he made his decision.

He tried to say it with the best smile he could manage. “Yeah. That sounds great.”

Will’s smile was much more well-executed. Nico supposed he’d had a lot more practice.

“It sure does.”

Will pulled a huge book from a backpack and dropped it on the kitchen table.

Nico stared at its cover. “Italian level one?”

Will slid into the seat next to him, scratching the back of his head. “Yeah, I dropped Spanish for it this year. I thought it would, uh, be more interesting, or something.” He sighed, opening the book and flipping through the glossy pages. “Turns out it’s just difficult.”

Nico watched as he scanned each new chapter title, searching for something. “You do know that I speak Italian, right?”

Will’s movements halted entirely. “You do?”

“Yeah, duh. Don’t tell me you haven’t noticed my accent. Everyone does.”

Will turned to him. “No, no, no, I’ve noticed the accent. Um, a lot, actually. It’s cute.” His face was flushing now. “I just—didn’t know you actually spoke the language. I figured you would’ve just remembered a few phrases or something. You know, considering you haven’t lived in Italy since you were ten or something, and that was, like, seventy years ago. Sorry, you probably hate people mentioning that. I’m rambling, sorry. I’ll stop now.”

Nico couldn’t help smiling. “*Va bene*,” he said. “*Idiota*.”

Will leaned forward, brow furrowed. “Did you just call me an idiot?”

“*Non ti sto dicendo*.”

Will coughed. “I’m mad because I can’t tell what you’re saying, but it’s also, um, wow.” He fumbled for his glass of water that was probably left over from breakfast and took a gulp. “I’m just going to hope that you’re not saying anything mean.”

Nico grinned. “I would never.”

Will glanced back down at his textbook. “I wish I could translate everything you’re saying, but I’m too slow. Hey, here’s something I could say—*migliore amico*.”

Nico buried his face in his hands—mainly to cover his growing smile. “*Non ci posso credere...*”

Will poked his arm. “Why don’t you just say everything in Italian? It’s such a gorgeous language.”

Nico fought the urge to retaliate and kept his hands to himself. “Because then no one would understand me, *idiota*. Except for that Chiara girl, I guess.”

“Who cares?” Will replied, folding his arms on the table and resting his head against them, still gazing up at Nico. “It sounds so beautiful.” He paused. “I mean, cool, or, uh, whatever. Yeah. Cool.”

“Uh, thanks,” Nico replied.

“Yeah,” Will said again. After a moment’s hesitation, he abruptly stood. “Um, so, I’m gonna go check on my mom, alright? And then we can think of somewhere fun to go, maybe. If you want. Or we could just stay here and, like, play video games. That’s cool, too. Whatever you want, really. But I’m gonna check on my mom now, so yeah.”

And with that, he was out of the kitchen and up the stairs, and Nico was left wondering what in Hades had made him so goddamn flustered. He knew he’d drive himself up a wall thinking about it, though, so he attempted to clear his mind and focus instead on the totally-not-just-as-stressful topic of figuring out what he wanted to do with Will (of course, there was a very clear answer, but he couldn’t just say *that*, obviously).

Video games definitely sounded great. So did going out, though, which surprised him. He supposed that he was just so far gone at that point that doing *anything* with Will sounded like an absolute blast.

Now that Will was upstairs, the entire floor was completely silent. He sat still at the table, just twiddling his thumbs. He had never been alone in a house before. Would it be rude of him to wander around, to just take a peak at the living room that was behind him?

Since when did he care about what was rude? Nico stood, pushed in his chair, and walked into the room. The hardwood floor turned to soft gray carpet, the white walls to dark gray. A fireplace was carved into the far wall, and the mantle atop it was crowded with framed photos. He stepped closer.

The first one that caught his eye was of a tiny blond child—Will, of course, he assumed—at around age three or four. The curly hair was the same, but thin and wispy like maiden grass, and the smile was, too, with the exception of obvious baby teeth. He was standing in some parking lot in a yellow raincoat and matching boots, smiling away despite the fact that the air was probably wet and cold and gross. Nico supposed that he had already developed his cheery optimism before he started preschool.

There were others—six- or seven-year-old Will dressed in overalls and standing in a field, present-day Will with his mother by a waterfall, a tiny baby swaddled in a blanket that really bore no physical resemblance to him yet somehow still held a familiar peaceful expression—but Nico was interrupted in his observation when he felt a tap on his shoulder.

He whirled around, and Will was so close he could smell the hand soap he had just used. “Zeus almighty, Solace. You can’t just sneak up behind me like that. One of these days I’m going to have a heart attack.”

Will shook his head. “I could say the same to you, di Angelo.” He didn’t move away at all, just looked over Nico’s shoulder. “Oh gods, these pictures. I wish my mom would put at least *some* of them away.” He gestured to one of him at around age nine or ten wearing a giant cowboy hat. “Ones like this.”

Nico shrugged. “I think they’re nice. I wish I had pictures. Or, just, I don’t know—something documenting my childhood.”

“Oh,” Will replied quietly. “Yeah. Sorry.”

Nico shook his head rapidly. “No, no, it’s fine. I get it. I mean,” he gestured to the cowboy picture and the one next to it, a cat costume, “these are a little embarrassing, huh?”

Will grinned. “Yeah, they are.” They were both silent for a moment, until he placed his hand on Nico’s shoulder—in a way that was almost a sideways-embrace, but wasn’t really since Nico sort of turned to face him and made it more of an awkward shoulder-grab. “So, what do you say we go out, do something fun, avoid silly Halloween costumes, and take some new pictures to add to the collection?”

Nico raised his eyebrows. “Do you think your mom would appreciate us replacing her photos?”

Will smiled. “Of course. It’s a little heavy on my face, anyway, don’t you think? You’ll add some nice contrast.”

“I can’t figure out whether that’s supposed to be a compliment or an insult.”

“Whichever you prefer,” Will replied with a smirk. “Now, I’ll grab us some sweatshirts, since it’s a little chilly out today, and then we’ll head out.”

“Alright,” Nico agreed.

And with that, Will spun on his heel and marched toward the laundry room.

Nico watched him go. *What am I ever going to do with this guy?*

Chapter End Notes

I am HYPED for writing the next chapter...I know I always say it'll be the next week but we'll see, especially since this one took almost two (I think)

ANNOUNCEMENT: I made a fandom-related twitter account, @percyspillowpet! I probably won't post much at all, but tweet at me asking me to update this fic and I'll let you know how it's going. You could also give me prompts/ideas for other fics if you'd like. Or just start a fun conversation. I get lonely sometimes.

If you want to follow my ~professional~ twitter, it's @sarahmclwrites :)

AND if you haven't yet, please please please check out my Percy Jackson musical and share it around! It has raving reviews ;) Thank you to everyone who has already watched it/liked/commented/etc., it makes my day!! :)

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDgYzaWkCm7fMovEj6NH5eEc07QCOv4QP)

list=PLDgYzaWkCm7fMovEj6NH5eEc07QCOv4QP

Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

“This place is just a little ways down the road, by the way,” he said. “Barely half a mile. Won’t take too long.”

“That’s okay,” Nico replied. “I’m not in a rush.”

Will smiled. “Good. I’m not, either.” They reached the end of Will’s street then. “We’re going to have to cross here. Don’t worry; I’ll hold your hand.”

“You mean I’ll hold yours, wimp,” Nico muttered.

Chapter Notes

Adding two chapters in one week? I don't know her

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

After being zipped against his will—ha, ha—into a thin leather jacket that was deemed “a perfect fit,” Nico was pulled out the front door and back into the fresh air.

Yes, he’d admit it—he was an outdoor person. Being inside someone else’s house was awkward and stuffy and toyed too much with his claustrophobia, especially when he couldn’t spot an easy escape route (besides shadow-travel, which was always risky in public). But outside, everything was fair game. He could run as far as he wanted with nothing to stop him but his own fatigue. If he said something stupid to Will, he could climb up a tree and never come down. Perhaps it was the result of being trapped in a hotel for seventy years, but Nico really didn’t see the appeal of having a roof over one’s head.

“So, uh, where are we going?” he asked as Will dragged him down the driveway and onto the sidewalk.

“My favorite ice cream stand,” he replied. “And then the pet store, maybe, because I wanna look at the kittens.”

“You’re a cat person?”

“Yeah. You?”

Nico nodded.

“But I thought you had a dog—Mrs. O’Leary?”

He shrugged. “She’s not really mine—she’s Percy’s, technically, but she’s a free spirit. Percy and I just take care of her when she’s at Camp Half-Blood. Besides, who said I can’t like both?”

Will snickered. “It’s okay if you’re bisexual, Nico. No judgement here.”

Nico’s cheeks burned, and he became infinitely more aware of Will’s hand holding his own. “You know I’m gay, Will.”

It felt weird on his tongue. It was the first time he had said it out loud—well, not the first time he’d said he liked guys; that had been mentioned back during that cabin-rooftop spill of his entire life story (not entire, he reminded himself. You still haven’t told him about Cupid). It was just the first time he had said that particular word.

Will raised his eyebrows at him and held up their joined hands for a moment. “Wow, who would’ve guessed?”

Nico didn’t even *want* to think about what he could possibly be implying with that. Luckily, he wasn’t given a chance to consider it, as Will spoke up again.

“This place is just a little ways down the road, by the way,” he said. “Barely half a mile. Won’t take too long.”

“That’s okay,” Nico replied. “I’m not in a rush.”

Will smiled. “Good. I’m not, either.” They reached the end of Will’s street then. “We’re going to have to cross here. Don’t worry; I’ll hold your hand.”

“You mean I’ll hold yours, wimp,” Nico muttered.

“I heard that. Oh, look; we can cross now.”

They hurried across and successfully landed on the opposite sidewalk.

“I usually just shadow-travel across busy roads,” Nico admitted.

Will huffed indignantly. “Don’t you shadow-travel everywhere anyway? Why would you even need to cross a road?”

Without hesitation, Nico looked him dead in the eye. “To get to the other side.”

Will nearly doubled over with laughter. His laugh was adorable, and Nico’s heart rate accelerated unhealthily. When he finally recovered and faced him again, he was still grinning. “I like this side of you.”

Nico frowned. “Are you saying you don’t like the others?”

Will’s eyes widened. “No, no, no! Not at all I like *every* side of you, di Angelo.”

For a doctor, Will Solace sure wasn't good on his blood pressure. "Oh. Um. That was a joke. But thanks."

Will chuckled. "I can never tell whether you're joking or not."

Nico smirked. "My dad said that to me once."

Will went silent for a few moments, and Nico was worried he'd said something wrong, but their joined hands remained together, so he just waited.

"You talk to your dad much?" Will finally asked. His voice was small.

Nico shrugged. "I haven't since July. But between the two wars, I was down in his palace a lot. We didn't *talk* often, and when we did, it wasn't usually very friendly, but it was... something."

Will nodded slowly. "I guess I'm not missing out on much, then. I've never talked to Apollo in my entire life. None of us at camp have, as far as I'm aware, except for your friends that have met him on quests. I think Percy mentioned him once." He swallowed. "I wish I at least knew what he's like—if he's nice, or annoying, or makes stupid jokes, or is an awful person I'd never want to be around ever."

"Those last three pretty much sum him up," Nico replied, and to the incredulous look he received, added, "Yeah, I met him once."

"You *what*?"

"I met Apollo. Your dad. Remember how I told you about Percy, Annabeth, Grover, and Thalia rescuing me and my sister from that boarding school?"

"Yeah?"

"Well, Apollo was the one who drove us back to camp?"

"Drove you?"

"Well, not really *drove*, I guess. Flew."

"*Flew*?"

"Yeah. In his sun bus."

Will blinked twice. By this point, his pace had slowed to a near stop. "My dad has a sun bus?"

"It's a car, actually," Nico replied. "He just turned it into a bus so we could all fit—the Hunters of Artemis were with us, too. And on the ride to camp, he let Thalia pilot, even though she was terrified, and she accidentally torched half of New England." Will just stared at him incomprehensibly. "You have to keep the car at a certain altitude," Nico explained. "It's the literal sun. It burns stuff."

Will looked like he was about to throw up and start laughing simultaneously, which Nico figured wouldn't be very fun.

"Sorry," he said. "I'm rambling. If you don't want to hear about your dad, I get it."

Will shook his head immediately. "No, it's okay. It's cool, actually. I mean...what was he like?"

Nico shrugged. "Well, Thalia said he was hot."

"Was he?"

He scowled. "That's weird, Will; I'm not answering that."

"I'm just *wondering*. Objectively. Do I look like him? Chiron is always telling me I look like him."

Nico glanced him up and down, trying not to get caught up in it for too long. Of course, this was in vain, and his arrhythmia started up again. "Um, yeah, I guess. You're less..." He trailed off, making stupid hand gestures that definitely didn't convey his message.

"I'm what?" Will asked, grinning. "Less what?"

Nico glanced at his shoes, trying to walk a little faster. "Less obnoxious about it," he mumbled.

Will leaned into his shoulder. "What do you mean?"

Nico gestured with his free hand. "Well...Apollo was like, *oh, look at me, I look like an Abercrombie model, everyone loves me*. And you're just..." He couldn't help glancing over again, and Will was smiling right at him. "You look like an Abercrombie model, but you're not trying to shove it in everyone's faces," he managed to choke out.

"Aw," Will replied, still grinning cheekily. He squeezed his hand. "That's so poetic of you, Nico."

Nico frowned. "That's another thing about Apollo. He was *terrible* at poetry."

Will scoffed. "Really? But that's what he's the god of."

Nico shrugged. "I know. I'm probably gonna get blasted to smithereens for saying this, but he's *awful*."

"There's another difference between us, then," Will replied. "I'm a *great* poet."

Nico raised his eyebrows. "I don't believe that for a second."

"Rude," Will huffed. Then he cleared his throat and placed his free hand on his chest. "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"

“No. This ends right now.”

Will tried his best to look sad, but Nico saw right through it. “Jerk,” he muttered. “Whatever. I’ll just write poetry about someone else, then.” Then he glanced back ahead of them. “Oh, hey, we’re here. Let’s put aside our differences and eat some ice cream.”

Chapter End Notes

I decided to write this chapter while I was sitting in a plane, waiting for it to take off, and then finished it during the 2-hour flight. I had literally zero plans for it and just went with the flow, and I think it came out pretty damn well. I needed a bit of a filler that was just some fun conversation, and I hope you all enjoyed it as well :)

Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

“Nico, you didn’t have to do this,” he said, though his widened, sparkling eyes said otherwise.

Nico shook his head in exasperation. “I told you, Solace. I’m fine. I can shadow-travel five miles without hurting myself.”

“But this was shadow-traveling two people!”

“Yeah, but you’re such an airhead that you don’t even count.”

“Rude.”

Chapter Notes

My excuse for lateness this time is that I had to take the ACT, but it still really shouldn't have taken this long to write one chapter...

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The ice cream was amazing, and so was the rest of Nico’s day.

After they finished eating, Will described downtown Austin to him in great detail—all the shops they could browse, landmarks they could see. Nico then grabbed his hand and whisked them into the shadows before he even had a chance to finish his last sentence. When they re-emerged, he was, of course, furious, but that ridiculous indignation fell away almost immediately once he realized where they had appeared.

“Nico, you didn’t have to do this,” he said, though his widened, sparkling eyes said otherwise.

Nico shook his head in exasperation. “I told you, Solace. I’m *fine*. I can shadow-travel five miles without hurting myself.”

“But this was shadow-traveling two people!”

“Yeah, but you’re such an airhead that you don’t even count.”

“Rude.”

“You’re rude.”

“You need to work on your comeback game.”

“Shut up.”

And then Will showed him all around the city he called home.

One of their first stops was a music store, which was stocked with more guitars than Nico had ever seen in his entire life.

He pointed to one on a lower rack and looked at Will. “You should play something.”

Will shook his head. “Nah, I’m no good at it.”

“I saw you play when you dragged me to the bonfire the second night I spent in the infirmary!”

He refused again, however, making some lame excuse about how he “wasn’t use to these instruments” and “didn’t have a song ready,” as if he didn’t realize that Nico knew he could play just about anything by ear and could probably make one with three broken strings sound like a thousand dollars.

Oh, well. Some other time, Nico supposed.

Next, they ended up at a bookstore, in which Will purchased a stack of medical-related texts that all looked too heavy and too wordy for Nico’s taste. After that, they entered a small boutique at the corner of two intersecting streets. He watched as Will tried on various silly hats and scarves and jewelry pieces, creating a new persona to go along with each one, and he was slapped in the face repeatedly by the overwhelming desire to yank him closer by the collar of his jacket and kiss him.

His mind kept flashing back to that night in the infirmary, kept replaying that moment when Will had barely fallen asleep and looked so peaceful, so serene—and again, he kept imagining what it would be like to see his awake reaction to a simple kiss on the cheek, a reaction that would have the potential to either vitalize or completely snuff out his entire hope for their future.

“Give me your phone,” Nico said at one point when Will was wearing a pink sequined suit jacket.

“Why?”

“You said you wanted to take pictures.”

And take pictures, Nico did. They ended up filling Will’s storage space with over a hundred.

Eventually they left the store, no new bags in hand, and decided to head back to Will’s house. They walked a few blocks until Nico stopped them in front of what he declared to be a

suitable shadow. He was about to grab Will's hand again and whisk them away when Will spoke up.

"Hey, that was really fun."

Nico nodded slowly. "Yeah, I guess it was."

Will grinned. "You're never going to be one for much enthusiasm, huh?"

He shrugged. "I guess."

Will laughed at that. "Of course you do. Well, I thought it was nice to be alone with just you for a while, no little kids to bother us."

Nico raised his eyebrows. "You make it sound like we're middle-aged parents."

Will's eyes went wide for a second, and then he coughed. "Yeah. Ha." He glanced at the sky, which was already starting to turn pink, and then back at Nico. "Well, I'm ready when you are, Death Boy."

"Don't call me that," Nico replied, before he pulled them both into the shadows.

As soon as they reappeared in Will's kitchen—and after Nico had caught him and prevented him from face-planting on his own floor—he went upstairs to check on his mother. He wasn't gone long, and Nico waited at the kitchen table until he returned, watching the sunset through the window—the sunset that marked his second night at Will's house.

"Hey," Will said, re-entering the room. "My mom is wondering if you're staying for dinner."

Nico hesitated. "Um...is it okay?"

Will nodded with a gentle smile. "Of course, as long as you want to."

Nico nodded in return. "Okay. Yeah, I do."

His smile grew into a larger grin. "Awesome. She's just finishing some ironing upstairs, and then she'll be right down. I just have to find something to make, now. Care to join me?"

Nico followed him over to the pantry. Will rummaged through the shelves, swearing repeatedly as he couldn't seem to find anything that he was looking for.

"I've got nothing," he admitted, eventually stepping back.

"But there's so much food here," Nico replied, gesturing to the various jars of preserved vegetables, bags of flour and sugar, and canned goods.

Will rolled his eyes. "Yeah, but not, like, anything I can actually make."

"What do you mean?"

“Boxed mac and cheese or pre-made pizza crust is what I mean, Nico.”

Nico stared at him, horrified. “Boxed? Pre-made?”

Will raised his eyebrows. “You say those as if they are terrible curses.”

Nico nodded slowly. “Um, yeah—they are.”

Will spread his hands. “So what’s *your* plan, then, Mr. Pretentious?”

Nico reached for a fresh tomato in one hand and grabbed a clove of garlic with the other. “I’m gonna show you an authentic Italian home-cooked meal, you disgusting urbanite.”

This caused Will to blink a few times, processing his words, before he stepped back and raised his hands in surrender. “Fine, di Angelo. Impress me.”

He shook his head. “No way am I letting you lounge around while I do all the work. Where do you keep your aprons?”

“Uh, we don’t really use them, but I think there are a couple on the bottom shelf—” He was cut off as Nico spotted them, grabbed two, and tossed one at his chest.

“You’re my sous chef now, Solace. Set a pot of water on the stove and get it boiling.” He tied his apron, which was neon pink and said *Kiss The Cook*. He honestly didn’t give a flying fuck. “I’ll get started on the pasta.”

Will just stood there, holding the apron as if it would bite him. “...*Homemade* pasta?”

Nico glared at the bag of flour in the pantry. “That’s the only way it should be.”

“You’re actually Scott Conant.”

“I have no idea who that is,” Nico replied. “Now, let’s get to work.”

Chapter End Notes

This staying-at-Will's-house story arc is honestly going to drag on forever...and ever...and ever...nah, I promise I'll try to wrap it up within the next chapter or two, and then we'll return to camp and more actual plot/conflicts. I just really like writing effortless, pointless, fluffy stuff sometimes, ya feel?

EDIT: Follow @percyspillowpet on Twitter! This isn't my personal account, it's one I made specifically to go with this AO3 account and for posting fandom-related things if I ever feel like it. I'll be tweeting updates about this fic, so turn on notifications if you want an alert whenever it's updated :)

Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

this is gonna make y'all hate me so much more than you already do...but it's a long one on which I spent a lot of time, so enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

An hour later, Will's mother walked into the kitchen, looked at them both in their aprons and the various pots and pans littering the stove and countertops, and bursted into laughter.

"Nico," she said through her smile, "my son can't cook for his life, so this must be your doing."

He nodded cautiously. "Yeah. I, uh, learned from my mom when I was little. Just the basics."

"Just the basics?" Will spluttered, almost dropping the wooden spoon he was using to stir the boiling pasta. "Mom, Nico can make pasta. From *scratch*."

Ms. Solace raised her eyebrows. "Well, I'm excited to try it." She then leaned closer, pretending to whisper to just Will. "We should keep him around."

Nico's cheeks heated up, and Ms. Solace ruffled his hair.

"It's just about ready," he said. "Will, where do you keep your plates?"

"I'll grab them," he replied, opening a cabinet above his head.

His mother smiled. "I'll wait at the table, then."

After plating the meal and neatly folding his apron, Nico slid into a seat next to Will and across from his mother.

"Finally," Will mumbled. "I'm starving. I was just severely overworked."

"Oh, sure," Nico replied. "You were literally just standing there stirring the entire time."

"Not true! I sprinkled the cheese on top."

At that, all three of them laughed. "Let's eat," Ms. Solace said.

Nico had been worried about an awkward silence during the meal since he'd never had a real conversation with Will's mother before, but that just seemed to give her more things to talk about. She asked Nico about his favorite camp activities (helping in the infirmary was his real

answer, but he said capture-the-flag), what his plans for Christmas were (none), and if Will was always nice to him (most of the time, he replied, to which Will kicked his ankle underneath the table and pouted). He, in turn, asked her about her life in Austin—what she did for fun (painting and gardening), if there were any good restaurants around (none that served pasta as good as his), and if Will was always a good son (most of the time, she said, which brought another groan out of him).

The whole time she was speaking, Will kept touching him. He bumped their ankles together, handed him a napkin and let their fingers brush, and rest his elbow on the table so it was just barely against his forearm. He poked Nico's side when he said something funny, flicked the side of his head when he made a snarky comment, and even leaned his head on his shoulder for a brief second when he said something half-nice to Ms. Solace about his hard work in the infirmary—and all of it was driving him nuts.

He kept glancing at Will's mom, wondering if she was noticing it as much as he was, but she seemed entirely oblivious. Eventually, she stood up, brushing off her shirt and collecting all three of their plates. She looked exhausted, and Nico immediately felt bad for tiring her out with conversation—he, of all people, knew how that felt. But then she smiled at him.

“Thank you, Nico. This was great.”

He stood, returning the gesture. “It’s no problem. I should say thanks, too, for letting me crash here last night. I kind of invited myself.”

Ms. Solace looked at him, then at Will, and then back again, still maintaining the same warm expression that reminded him of the bonfire back at camp. “You’re welcome to stay anytime you’d like.”

Will tapped his wrist with one finger and grinned. It sent a chill up his arm. “Definitely.”

Ms. Solace then set the plates on the counter and pushed in her chair. “Well, I’m heading to my room. Will,” she said, looking pointedly at her son, “be nice.” Then she smiled again. “Good night, boys.”

After she was up the stairs, Will turned to him, and the smirk on his face almost gave Nico three strokes. With the sun’s last rays streaming through the window and no lights turned on in the kitchen, his hair looked like fire.

“So,” he said.

“So,” Nico agreed.

Will reached for his hand and held it, and Nico didn’t resist. Why should he? He knew he wouldn’t be able to, anyway. And, hey, they had walked around like this all day. Maybe, he considered with a lump in his throat and fireworks in his chest, this could be the new normal.

They just stood there for a few moments, leaning against the table, until Will cleared his throat. “Are you staying tonight?”

Nico shrugged. "I'm not sure." He hesitated. "Is that okay?"

Will nodded. "It's good enough for me."

He smiled. "Good. Now, there's something you have to do for me."

Will raised his eyebrows. "And that is?"

"You said back at the music store that you couldn't play on those guitars, so you have to play something on your own. I know you have one; I saw a pick on the table in the living room."

Will rolled his eyes and dramatically sighed. "Ugh, *fine*. But I'm telling you—I can't carry a tune to save a life."

"Actually, that's not true. I've seen you work some miracles with those healing hymns."

It took Will a second to catch on, but then he groaned and started walking out of the room, pulling Nico with him. "Let's just get this over with, shall we?"

He led him down the hall and opened a door at the end of it, unfortunately unlinking their hands. The room was dark when they stepped in, but then Will flicked a switch on the wall and suddenly Nico was engulfed in the warm glow of golden Christmas fairy lights. They were strung along the headboard of a bed, a bookshelf, and around parts of the ceiling, encircling the entire perimeter.

"Welcome to my cave," Will said, gesturing in an arc.

"This is your room?" Nico asked. "It's...really nice."

Will smiled. "Thanks." Then he moved toward the bed, and Nico followed. As soon as Will sat down, he reached toward the opposite side, where an acoustic guitar was balanced against the wall.

Nico moved to sit carefully, as if the bed were made out of glass. He wanted to be close to Will, unfortunately, but he kept a safe distance away.

"How long have you been playing?" he asked as Will began plucking a few strings with one hand and fiddling with some knobs with the other.

Will frowned. "I'm not sure, actually. Eight years? Nine years? It seems like forever." Then he looked pointedly at him. "I'm still not very good though, I promise."

Except he was very good. As soon as he started strumming and humming along softly, Nico felt like he was melting. He found himself leaning in, moving closer, as if he could envelop himself in the sound of the music.

And then Will started to sing. It was quiet and intimate, not loud and showy—he was singing for only Nico to hear. The tune was distantly familiar; he had probably heard it on a radio in a coffee shop somewhere. The lyrics spoke of love and innocence and blissfulness, but he wasn't paying attention to the specifics—he focused on Will's voice, which flowed out like honey and made him shiver like the gentle summer breezes they had felt on the roof.

Then the song ended, but nothing was really over. Will was looking at him, now, instead of at his guitar. His face was a little pink, but mostly golden, and Nico absentmindedly wondered if his looked the same—except for how gorgeous it was, because he was sure in that moment that Will was the most beautiful person in the history of the universe. And the most beautiful person in the universe was staring at him, leaning closer.

Their hands found each other, the guitar placed to the side. Nico worried for a moment that his palms were clammy, but then he was distracted by Will’s eyes, which were closer now than they ever had been before. And also his smile—he was smiling. Nico then realized he was smiling, too, without even trying.

They were close enough now that if Will dropped his head down just a few inches, their foreheads would touch—and he did. He sighed, and his breath tickled the bridge of Nico’s nose.

He was still smiling. He couldn’t seem to stop.

“What is this?” he asked.

“Whatever we want it to be,” Will answered.

And then Nico was tilting his chin up, and he was closing his eyes as he watched Will do the same, and—

—and a wall of mist materialized in between them, showing the grinning face of Percy Jackson.

Chapter End Notes

y'all thought they were gonna kiss

and

y'all

were

wrong

(PS: Follow @percyspillowpet on twitter for updates on this fic! It's also a great way to get instant notifications whenever I update, because I tweet with the link!)

(PPS: if you haven't yet, check out my Percy Jackson musical:

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDgYzaWkCm7fMovEj6NH5eEc07QCOv4QP)

[list=PLDgYzaWkCm7fMovEj6NH5eEc07QCOv4QP](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDgYzaWkCm7fMovEj6NH5eEc07QCOv4QP))

Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

Nico groaned, rubbing his temples. “What is it, Percy?”

“Oh. Yeah. Uh, I just wanted to let you know that my first week of school went pretty well—”

“So, no homework assignments yet, then?”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

More than ever before, Nico hated Percy Jackson.

“Hey, man,” he greeted. “Where are you? That doesn’t look like the Hades cabin.”

Nico grit his teeth. “I’m kind of busy. And that’s none of your business.”

Behind the image, Will raised his eyebrows and chuckled. Nico motioned for him to stay quiet, but the damage was done.

“Who’s that?”

He glared at Will, which just made him smile. “No one.”

Percy smirked. “Hi, Will.”

“Hey, Percy,” Will replied, still out of sight of the message.

Nico groaned, rubbing his temples. “What is it, Percy?”

“Oh. Yeah. Uh, I just wanted to let you know that my first week of school went pretty well
—”

“So, no homework assignments yet, then?”

“—fuck off. I’m coming to visit camp tomorrow morning, and I was just wondering if you were gonna be there so we and Jason can have breakfast together, just like old times.”

Nico crossed his arms. “Old times. Percy, you left a *week* ago.”

Percy grinned and shrugged. “I’m bad at excuses. I just really wanna see everyone, especially you guys. So, anyway...” He seemed to be studying something past Nico for a moment, and

he was tempted to look over his shoulder. “I’m assuming you’re not at camp right now, ‘cause I don’t recognize that wall.”

“You think you know every wall in camp?”

Will snickered, and Nico glared at him.

“Yeah, actually,” Percy replied. “Anyway, I’m just wondering if you’ll be back tomorrow morning.”

The way Percy was smirking set his nerves on edge—it was like he knew some big secret that Nico didn’t. Like he knew exactly what he was going to say. And one thing Nico did not want to be, if anything, was predictable.

“Yeah,” he said. “Of course.”

He felt Will’s piercing gaze, but he avoided reciprocating it.

Percy’s eyes widened just a little. “Oh? Okay. Cool.” He fidgeted with his hands for a moment, and then grinned again, though there was a definitive hesitation about it. “Well, see you then.”

“Sure,” Nico replied. “See you.”

Then Percy swiped his hand through the air, and the image dissipated.

He waited for Will to say something—anything—but he didn’t. And Nico couldn’t read his expression due to the fact that he was too busy picking at a stray thread on his jeans. He couldn’t bring himself to do anything more than wait.

“So,” Will finally said. His voice was still as quiet as it had been during the song, but it had grown more distant. No longer was he speaking to just Nico; he was speaking only to break the silence in the air.

“Yeah,” Nico replied. He rose from the bed, brushing off his shirt even though it was perfectly clean, and still avoided eye contact as if it would poison him. “I—”

“This was really fun.”

The sudden change in volume caused him to glance up and accidentally bite the witch’s apple. It would enter his bloodstream now—Will’s warm gaze that was somewhere between a flickering candle and a raging wildfire—and he knew he had to escape as soon as possible, before it would shut down his heart.

But he didn’t move any further. “Yeah,” he replied. “It really was.”

After a moment of simply staring, Will stood, rushed over to his desk, picked up a pen, and began scribbling something down on a small notepad.

“What are you—”

He then whirled around and held out a torn scrap of paper. “Here.”

Nico took it—a set of ten barely decipherable digits and a haphazard smiley face. *Doctor's handwriting*, his mind told him.

“What is this?” he asked.

Will exhaled. “You’re never going to get less dense, are you? It’s my phone number, idiot.”

“But I don’t have a phone.”

He rolled his eyes. “Get one. You’re the son of freaking Hades—the god of wealth, if you forgot. You could buy the goddamn iPhone X if you wanted to.”

“I don’t even know what that is.”

He rubbed his forehead with both hands. “Told you—dense as ever. If you don’t want to buy one, just borrow someone else’s. I have a few campers’ numbers.”

Nico looked at Will, then down at the number, and then back at Will again. “But...couldn’t you just Iris-message?”

Will groaned, further burying his face. “I’m out of damn drachmas, Nico.”

“Oh.”

“And I want to keep in touch, alright?”

“Okay.”

“We need to have at least one phone call every week.”

“Okay.”

“And try to text me every day, even if it’s with different phones.”

“Got it.”

“Sound like a plan?”

“Yep.”

“Good. And I swear to the gods, if you don’t respond—”

Nico decided he’d had enough talking, and he knew by now that he wasn’t very good at it, so he went with actions instead. Thankfully, when he hugged him, Will finally shut up for a few seconds.

“I’ll miss you a lot,” he said after a moment.

“I’ll miss you more, idiot,” Nico replied. His voice came out all weird and hoarse, and he realized his eyes were quickly filling.

Then, all too quickly, Will pulled back. Based on the way he was looking at him and their current proximity, Nico had a fleeting hope that maybe he'd make another, more successful attempt at what they had almost done just minutes ago; unfortunately, it was almost immediately snuffed when Will let go of him entirely and stepped away.

"Take care, Nico," he said. "I don't want to come back to the infirmary next—well... whenever I do—and find you even partially translucent. You're much nicer when you're solid."

"Okay," Nico replied. "The same goes for you. Don't overheat, Sunshine."

The nickname felt foreign on his tongue, but Will laughed. "Alright. I'll try."

And with one last shared smile, Nico stepped into the shadows, failing to notice the tear that fell onto the carpet as he faded away, the tiny stain it left behind, and the boy who sunk to his knees, pressing it with his finger before it could dry.

Chapter End Notes

fun fact: I just spent six chapters on ONE DAY of the story.

additional fun fact: that day is finally over and the story is finally progressing normally again jfc

I'm sorry this chapter took more than two weeks (yikes)--I woke up with a really bad virus on Christmas (super fun) and spent a week trying to heal myself by taking too many hot showers (not good on my skin but helped my sinuses somewhat) and watching the entirety of Sherlock for the fourth (or fifth?) time. I think I wrote about one sentence every four days until I lied down in bed tonight and wrote 900 more words in the last forty-five minutes. Anyway, I'm feeling better now except for the occasional coughing fit, which means more writing, right?! Hooray! No, because school and work and rehearsals are starting again. Boo-hoo. But this fic will honestly be finished in about five to ten thousand more words (ending at 50-55k), and I have had the ending planned since pretty much the beginning, so I shouldn't have too much trouble. It's just a matter of finding time, energy, and inspiration all at the same convenient moment.

Thanks as always for reading, and be sure to follow @percyspillowpet on twitter for fic updates!

Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

Nico whirled around to a tap on the shoulder during a solitary lunch and found himself face-to-face with Cecil Markowitz.

“Hey,” he said, a wide grin on his face. “How’s it going, di Angelo?”

Nico scowled. “What do you want?”

Chapter Notes

another chapter? just five days after the last one? what is this madness?
enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“So,” Percy began. “Are you gonna explain?”

Nico paused in the middle of raising his fork to his mouth. “Explain what?”

“Yeah,” Jason said. “What?”

“You know,” Percy replied, swirling a spoon in his coffee. “Where you were and what you were doing yesterday.”

“Where was he?” Jason asked. “What was he doing?”

He nodded toward Nico. “Why don’t you ask him?”

Jason turned to face him. “Nico, care to share?”

“No,” he replied. “There’s nothing to share.”

Percy rolled his eyes. “Come on, man; it’s nothing to be embarrassed about. Hey, Annabeth and I once snuck off to my apartment for the entirety of February vacation week since my parents were going away! Now, how hard was that for me to say?”

“Dude, TMI,” Jason said.

“You’re the one making it embarrassing,” Nico replied.

Then, right as he was about to put a bite of fried egg in his mouth, Jason pointed his fork at Nico. “Wait. Are you telling me that *you* snuck off somewhere with somebody?” “Close enough,” Percy grumbled.

Jason put down his food. “No way. Where’d you guys go?”

Nico stared down at his almost-empty plate. He was running out of food to eat in order to avoid speaking. “I don’t even know who you’re talking about.”

Jason poked his shoulder, and Nico was annoyed that he didn’t automatically wince. “I think it’s pretty obvious.”

Nico groaned, burying his face in his hands. “Fine. I don’t understand why you find it oh-so-fascinating, but I shadow-travelled to Will’s house in Austin *because Kayla asked me to*. And then I made sure he wasn’t dead because that wouldn’t be fun for anyone here. And I stayed over for *one night*, and I slept on the couch.” There was no need to mention that Will had also been on that couch, obviously. He looked up at Percy, who appeared to be choking on his coffee. “Happy?”

Jason put a hand on his back. “You were able to shadow-travel all the way to Austin? Are you feeling alright?”

“Yeah, thanks for asking,” he replied, still looking at Percy. “Is he okay?”

After another bout of coughing, Percy rubbed his eye and then raised his head again. “I’m fine. Totally fine.” He hesitated, placing his spoon back in the mug. “Overnight, huh?”

Nico let his head fall against the table. “I’m done. Done with both of you.”

Jason laughed. “Sorry. We’re just proud of you, and our lives aren’t exciting enough these days compared to the quest. Gotta have something to keep us on the edge of our seats.”

Nico groaned again, but the thing was—he was kind of proud of himself, too.

Seven days later, Nico whirled around to a tap on the shoulder during a solitary lunch and found himself face-to-face with Cecil Markowitz.

“Hey,” he said, a wide grin on his face. “How’s it going, di Angelo?”

Nico scowled. “What do you want?”

Cecil chuckled. “Someone’s in a good mood. Just thought I’d pop over and let you know that Will wants you to call him, and he wants me to let you use my phone to do that.”

Nico began to turn back around to face his lunch. “You don’t have to; it’s fine.”

But Cecil pulled him back by his shoulder. “Uh-uh. This is one of my best friends we’re talking about. Call him, goddamnit.”

Nico just stared at the cell phone he was holding out until he pressed some buttons and then shoved it in his lap. The screen was lit up, and bright white letters read *calling Will Solace*.

He suddenly panicked. He had never talked to anyone over the phone before, much less called them himself. What was he supposed to do? Should he go back to his cabin? Does he have to say hello when Will picks up? What if Will doesn't pick up? What if he panics so much that he just hangs up, right now—

"Hey, man," Cecil cut in. "I know we don't know each other that well, and we should probably change that. But, listen, I know it's hard talking to the person you really, really like."

Nico moved to glare at him, but his gaze was directed across the pavilion. When Nico followed it, he realized he was staring at the Hecate table.

"Oh," he said. "Lou Ellen?"

Cecil nodded. "Yeah. See? We're both stuck in the same rut. And he wants you to call him, so just *talk to him*."

Before he had a chance to respond, an almost-inaudible sound came from the phone in his lap. Nico looked at the phone, at Cecil, whose eyebrows were raised and arms were crossed, and back at the phone again. Then, with a sigh and a glare, he picked it up and held it to his ear.

"Uh, hi?"

"Hi." It was Will's voice, and it set his heart racing. "Is this Cecil? You don't sound like Cecil."

"Uh, no. It's me. Um, Nico."

"Oh!" Will exclaimed. "Nico! Hey!"

"Hey." He glanced up at Cecil, who had a stupid grin on his face. "One second." He brought the phone down to his shoulder. "Do you mind if I take this back to my cabin? I'll bring it back later."

Cecil shrugged, still smirking. "Go for it. See you later, Nico."

"Thanks." He brought the phone back to his ear and stood, facing the cabins and stepping out of the pavilion. "I'm back now. So...uh..."

"How's camp been?" Will asked, and Nico was infinitely grateful for him always being there to fill a painful silence.

"Fine," he replied, nodding one last time to Cecil as he left. "Good, actually. But—"

"Not as good without me there?"

"Yeah," he answered, voice dripping with sarcasm. "That's *exactly* what I was going to say."

Will laughed, and he wished he could see it in person—he hadn't realized how much he had missed it.

He missed Will. Of course he did. He'd never missed a living person so much before. But was he going to say that? Of course not.

"So," he began instead. "How's school?"

Will groaned dramatically, and as he launched into a story about his terrible, awful chemistry teacher while Nico walked back to Cabin 13, he was struck with understanding of why Will had asked him to call every week. He realized how happy just talking made him, and how maybe the feeling could go both ways.

He realized just how much he missed him, and perhaps how much he might be missed.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, this one was fast, and hopefully it was up to par as well. Let me know if you enjoyed, and I'll warn you now that school is starting back up again and therefore I likely won't have another update ready for at least a week or so—but who really knows ;)

Thanks for reading!

Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

“I promise I’ll stop teasing you and take it seriously if you just tell me what’s going on.”

“You already know what’s going on.”

Chapter Notes

I apologize yet again for the events you are about to witness, but for once I actually finished an entire chapter in one day, so consider it fair ;)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

October and November passed in sixty-one days that felt like sixty-one years.

Nico managed to get in touch with Will at least every seven, mostly using Cecil’s phone and occasionally Annabeth’s (when she came to check up on her cabin on certain Friday afternoons), and their calls were good. Fine. Acceptable, but far from satisfying. There was something missing, and both of them knew it. Something they hadn’t had a chance to finish—or, rather, begin. Something Nico had been so close to initiating. Something that could’ve gone horribly wrong, but he had a feeling it would’ve felt so right.

October and November came and went, and he spent more of the days than he had expected with his friends. Percy, back at camp for another weekend, hosted a Halloween party in his cabin, and he actually had a decent time—he might have even called it fun. He just wished Will could’ve been there, because Nico bet he would’ve had a hilarious costume. Or a really lame one that he still would have laughed at all the same.

Chiron put together a Thanksgiving feast, and he allowed the joining of all the tables in the pavilion. Nico had figured it would just cause more arguments and bitterness between rival cabins, but somehow, everyone sat together and got along just fine. Nico felt, for once, like he was part of something greater, even part of a *family*—but there was still one empty seat.

And then it was Christmas. Well, not technically, considering it was December twenty-third, but the celebrations were already in full swing. The Aphrodite cabin had decorated Thalia’s pine tree, the Hecate cabin adding a touch of magic to make it glow and sparkle. The Demeter kids had grown holly and made wreaths for every cabin door (even Nico’s). Austin was rounding up every demigod with any semblance of musical talent to form a chorus of carolers. Even less campers than usual were present—only those who had no family to visit

for the holidays—but everyone was contributing their fair share. Nico even offered to take Austin's infirmary shifts so he could hold extra rehearsals.

Almost the entirety of Camp Jupiter arrived that morning, filling most of the empty spaces in almost every cabin, including number thirteen. Hazel was there now, he knew, taking a nap to catch up with the jet lag. He hadn't seen her in ages—not since Percy's birthday party—and he couldn't wait to talk to her in person again. Of course, he wasn't sure *what* exactly he was going to be talking about, considering the only thing on his mind (and his friends') these days seemed to be how goddamn much he missed Will. Jason was driving him up a wall with the amount of times he brought up the issue.

"Hey, Nico!"

Speak of the devil.

Nico, sitting at Will's desk and totally not looking at the small, framed pictures of himself, his mom, and his siblings he kept there, spun around in his chair. "What do you want?"

Jason pulled up a nearby stool and sat down, leaning against the wall. "Hello to you, too. I was just wondering if you wanted to come Christmas shopping with me."

Nico raised an eyebrow. "You mean, *Nico, can you use your super cool and super convenient teleportation powers to take me into the city because I haven't bought a gift for my girlfriend yet?*"

Jason frowned. "That sounds nothing like me. And, yeah, that's partially true, but I doubt you've done any shopping yet, either."

Nico shrugged. "Maybe I have. I've been really bored, you know. I've had time to do normal things like that."

Jason chuckled. "Of course you've been bored."

Nico groaned, rubbing his eyes. "For the last time, Jason, I don't want to talk about it."

Jason leaned forward, putting his elbows on the desk. "Sure seems like you do. You're the one who brought it up. Spill."

"No."

"I promise I'll stop teasing you and take it seriously if you just tell me what's going on."

"You already know what's going on."

Jason sighed. "Look, you miss Will. I get it. Piper's with her dad right now in L.A., and I'm feeling just the same. But there's something else going on, too." He hesitated. "Did something happen when you were in Texas?"

Nico stared at one of the photographs. "I don't know. That's the problem."

"How so?"

“Because...” he started, but he couldn’t find the right words. “I don’t really know how to explain it. We were...sitting on his bed, and—” He looked up. “Stop smirking. It wasn’t like that.”

Jason managed to maintain a straight face, adjusting his glasses. “Then what *was* it like?”

Nico opened his mouth to speak, then closed it, and then opened it again. “I...well...he was singing and playing his guitar, and it was...really nice.” He glanced at Jason again, expecting him to be grinning or laughing or something, but he was just nodding along, listening. Nico liked this side of him better. “So then he finished the song, and he put his guitar down. And then...suddenly we were really close. Like...closer than ever before. And I was really nervous, but I think he was, too, and I was about to...” He trailed off, just gesturing weakly and hoping he got the message across.

Jason narrowed his eyes. “About to what?”

Nico stared down at the desk again. “Kiss him,” he said quietly.

They were both silent for a moment, and Nico already regretted telling him. It sounded so stupid when he said it out loud—like he actually had a chance at kissing Will and it resulting in anything other than disaster.

“I know what you’re thinking,” Jason said softly.

“No you don’t,” Nico retorted. “*I* don’t even know what I’m thinking.”

“Yes, I do. You think you’re not good enough, that Will’s completely out of your league, that he’ll never like you. But have you ever considered what *he* thinks? Because when anyone else looks at him, anyone besides you, it’s easy to see that Will Solace is crazy about you, Nico. You do have a chance—you just have to take it.”

Nico rubbed one side of his forehead. “So what do you think I should do? Because I just...I don’t know where to start.”

Jason smiled gently. “You do, actually. Just be you. Try again.”

“Try what again?”

“You know.”

“Like...I should try to kiss him again?” Again, he wasn’t a fan of how it sounded out loud.

“Yes, you dense—” Suddenly Jason’s mouth appeared to stop working, and he stared at something seemingly behind Nico’s head.

Dreading who or what could possibly have entered the infirmary, Nico turned slowly in the chair.

“Um,” Will said, eyes wide and face flushed. “Hi.”

Nico was paralyzed.

“How much, um,” Jason swallowed, “of that did you just hear?”

Will bit his lip and glanced at the ceiling. “Um...enough?” he squeaked.

He was holding a duffel bag in one hand, though he looked like he was about to drop it. His hair was a mess, like he’d just been wearing a hat. Gloves stuck out of his jacket pocket.

He then looked at Nico. “So, uh, what’s up?”

Words, Nico. You need to form words.

“What are you doing here?” He didn’t mean for it to sound so interrogative.

Will blinked twice and then smiled, but it was different than usual—unsure. “Here for the holidays. Or, uh, today, at least. I’m going back to my mom’s tomorrow morning for Christmas Eve.” He paused, fidgeting with the strap of his bag. “So, are we just going to ignore—”

And that’s when Nico had enough. Without another word, he dove into the shadow cast by the rising sun.

Chapter End Notes

I've been waiting almost eight months to write this chapter

this is it people

~the climax~

Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

Embarrassed was a total understatement. Mortified was a bit more accurate. Put to shame. Reduced to nothing. Miserable.

Chapter Notes

I think y'all can probably tell by how fast these updates are coming that I absolutely cannot wait to finish this. I'm so excited for you guys to see the ending :)

And again, I should apologize for this mess, but I actually really enjoyed writing it (am I satan?).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Nico was incredibly, terribly stupid.

He just needed to accept that about himself. He could always be relied on to make the dumbest mistakes. The worst choices. To go down the paths that deceive him into thinking they're the right ones, only to drop off at the end into a dark, bottomless pit.

Embarrassed was a total understatement. *Mortified* was a bit more accurate. *Put to shame*. *Reduced to nothing*. *Miserable*.

He never wanted to leave his cabin. Never again. He'd stay here with Hazel and Hazel only, because she could at least be trusted not to bother him when threatened. His other stupid friends would come running, pounding on the door, shouting to be let in, but eventually they'd forget, right? They'd first forget they were ever close, then that he even existed at all. They'd grow up, leave camp, move on with their lives.

Will would forget, too. He'd forget there was ever a stupid, socially-deficient, miserable kid on whom he'd taken such great pity, even going to the lengths of hanging out with him almost daily, taking a tour around the city with him, inviting him to stay at his house, and letting him develop stupid, stupid feelings. He'd be the last one to keep knocking, of course, every morning when he woke up with the sun, because Nico was his goddamn charity case, his science experiment, and he needed to check on the results.

He buried his face in his pillow, wishing the sound of Hazel's shower would drown out his thoughts.

He estimated he had about five minutes before she emerged from the bathroom, and then what would he do? He didn't want to hurt her, but he'd have to say or do something to get her to keep her distance and stop asking questions. Oh, well—he'd have to just wait and see what awful, hurtful, rash decision his worthless self would make.

Then came the first knock.

"Nico, please, just let me in. Gods, you've got it all wrong. I need to see you. Please."

He pulled the sides of the pillow up to cover his ears, but that only slightly muffled his voice.

"Fine. I'm coming in there myself."

Shit. He had shadow-travelled in here; he hadn't come through the door, so he hadn't bothered to lock it.

He scrambled out of bed and lunged at it, almost reaching the knob, but he was too late. The door pushed open, knocking him to the floor.

Will gasped. "Fuck! Oh gods, I'm so sorry. Here."

He offered a hand, but Nico didn't take it, instead scrambling backwards and standing on his own, brushing off his jeans. Will then stepped closer, his eyes wide, and Nico stumbled back. He then tried again, and Nico reached behind him, feeling for his bedpost, and then leaned against it.

"Okay," Will sighed, like he was losing a game and trying desperately to make a plan to turn the tide. Little did he know that Nico wasn't turning—not one bit.

"Nico," he said. "Look, I know you're embarrassed. I know you're really scared about what you said and how I feel about that. But I'm trying to tell you—" His eyes narrowed. "You're fading."

Nico risked a glance down at his hands, and, shit, it wasn't just his hands. His entire forearms, all the way up to his elbows, were translucent. But he had just...he moved to touch the bedpost again, and this time, his fingers fell straight through.

"This is the worst it's been since the war," Will murmured, staring at his arms like he was in some kind of trance. Then he cleared his throat. "Nico, this is serious. Please let me come over and take you to the infirmary. I'm not going to hurt you."

"Fuck off," Nico replied.

Will blinked a few times, then regained his composure, though Nico noticed his hands were shaking as he folded them into fists. "Please, Nico. Come on. If you don't want to talk right now, we don't have to talk. I'll wait. But this—" He nodded in the direction of his arms. "—is an emergency."

He put his arms behind his back. "Leave me alone, Solace." His tone even surprised himself, and reminded him of something. Of someone. When was the last time he sounded like this?

Will didn't move a muscle.

"I said, leave me *alone*, Will! What the hell is wrong with you?"

Of course.

Bryce Lawrence.

The thought brought bile to his throat.

Will was still for a moment longer, and then opened his mouth, then closed it, and then opened it again. "What—why can't you accept that people care about you, Nico? That *I* care about you?"

He wanted to punch something, but he knew his fists wouldn't work. "It's your goddamn *job* to care about people!" he shouted. "You're a fucking doctor!"

Will's eyes closed for a moment, and Nico wondered if he'd finally done it—if he'd finally broken Will Solace. After all these months of driving him up a wall, ignoring his requests, trying to get far too close to him without thoroughly thinking it through—

But when his eyes opened again, so slowly, they were filled with tears. A few fell down his face, one by one.

"Fine," he said, his voice cold and sharp as ice. He remained completely still. His eyes locked on to Nico's and he couldn't bring himself to look away, as much as he desperately wanted to. He *needed* to. This wasn't how it was supposed to go. Will was supposed to be gone by now.

"You're right," he continued. "It *is* my job to care about people. And maybe, at the beginning, that's why I brought you to the infirmary and took care of you and all that. Maybe the whole thing was just my healing instinct acting out. Saving you was my job." He sniffled, and that just caused a few more tears to roll out onto his cheek. "It was my job," he repeated, "to heal you. But—" He choked on his own voice, and when he spoke again, it broke. "But being your friend wasn't my job, and I really, really wanted to do that. I really, really tried." He coughed, trying to clear his throat. "And it wasn't—"

He hesitated, and Nico just stared, still unable to turn away.

"—it wasn't my job to fall in love with you."

And with that, he turned around, shaking his head, and reopened the door.

"Wait," Nico tried. "I—"

He slammed it in his face.

i bet y'all thought they were gonna make up in this one HA

tell me your thoughts, feelings, and how much you loathe me below :)

I want to take a moment to just thank everyone who has been keeping up with this!! I'm so grateful to each and every one of you (like 8,000 of you which is CRAZY) for reading, commenting, giving kudos, harassing me, etc. I appreciate it all so much and it makes my day to see that my hard work is enjoyed.

There's going to be somewhere between four and six more chapters left, most likely. Could be more or less, though. Stay tuned for another one (or five) later because I'm probably going to write all day. This chapter only took about an hour and a half which makes me laugh at the fact that some of them took 2+ weeks...

Chapter 37

Chapter Summary

“I’m just really stupid, I think. I don’t know how to talk to people. I don’t know how to accept that a guy might actually have feelings for me. And I especially don’t know how to express my own.”

She tapped his shoulder. “It sounds like you’re doing a pretty good job expressing them to me,” she replied. “Why don’t you just tell him all this?”

“I can’t.”

Chapter Notes

You all hate me now (for good reasons), but here's another chapter ;)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The slam of the door echoed throughout the room, which Nico realized was now silent. A moment later, a soft creak notified him that Hazel was exiting the bathroom.

“Nico?” Her voice cut through the silence like a knife. “What was that? I heard shouting.”

He didn’t bother turning to face her. “Yeah, sorry. Um, I’m going to take a nap, I think.”

He moved to crawl under the covers, but suddenly there was a hand wrapped around his upper arm.

“Wait. Talk to me. Something’s up.”

He attempted to yank his arm away, but Hazel was a lot stronger than she looked. “It’s nothing, I promise.”

You’ve kept every promise you’ve ever made.

“Damnit,” he muttered.

“What?” Hazel asked.

He gave in, sitting down on his bed and allowing Hazel to follow. He remained silent for a few moments, but when she didn’t say anything, either, he glanced up and saw that she was

staring with her eyebrows raised, expectant.

“I’ll wait,” she said.

Nico sighed. “Fine. But you have to understand, this is all my fault, okay? Don’t go attacking anyone on my behalf.”

Her eyes widened at that, but she nodded. “Fair enough. Let’s hear it.”

He took a deep breath. He had come out to his sister before regarding Percy, but this felt so much more difficult for some reason—perhaps because it’s harder telling someone you like someone in the present tense rather than the past.

“It’s Will,” he finally managed.

“Will,” Hazel said. “The guy you’re always going on about? Yeah, I figured, Nico, jeez. But *what* happened just now?”

“He...overheard something I said to Jason. Something I shouldn’t have said out loud. And I panicked, of course, and shadow-travelled back here. But then he came in here, and I was telling him to go away, and he got mad at me and left.”

She crossed her arms. “Now, that’s not very specific.”

He frowned. “The details aren’t important.”

“Yes they are. What did he hear you say? Was it something mean? Were you complaining about him behind his back? Did it have a different meaning and he just heard it out of context?”

Nico shook his head. “Not really any of those, no.”

“Then what in the world was it, Nico?”

He flexed his fingers, which had regained some of their tangibility, but not all. “Um...I told Jason that I...I liked him.”

There was a dreadful moment of silence, and Nico wondered if she was going to be completely disgusted or something. Again, this was him *liking* someone. Not used-to-have-a-dumb-crush-on-someone.

“Really?” she eventually said. “That’s it? What’s so bad about that?”

He shook his head. “Hazel, you don’t understand. I said I *like* him, and he heard it all. Everything.”

She raised an eyebrow. “So there was more?”

He felt his face flushing. “Maybe a little.”

“Come on, Nico, what was it?”

“I might have said that I wanted to kiss him?”

Hazel practically cooed. “Aw, Nico, you really think he’s upset at you about that?”

“Not that, exactly,” he replied. “He’s mad because I guess I sort of...rejected him?”

“What?”

“I don’t even know, Hazel.”

“Nico, why would you reject a guy who you just said you wanted to kiss?”

“I don’t know!” He groaned and flopped back on the bed, staring at the ceiling. “I’m just really stupid, I think. I don’t know how to talk to people. I don’t know how to accept that a guy might actually have feelings for me. And I especially don’t know how to express my own.”

She tapped his shoulder. “It sounds like you’re doing a pretty good job expressing them to me,” she replied. “Why don’t you just tell him all this?”

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because I’m not like you. You’re great at this. You’re empathetic and compassionate and all that. I’m just not. I mess things up and make people mad.”

Hazel seemed to think on this for a moment. “Then I know just the person you need to talk to.”

“What? Who?”

“Someone who is equally emotionally distant and might understand your thought process a little better. She also might kick your ass for putting yourself down so much.” She stood and headed toward the door. “I’ll be right back. Stay put.”

No more than five minutes later, Reyna Avila Ramirez-Arellano was pushed through the door of the Hades cabin, and it was shut firmly behind her. She stumbled in, glancing around wildly for a moment before her eyes landed on Nico.

She then quickly regained her proper praetor composure and walked over, her stern, dark eyes and toned arms as intimidating as ever. “So. I’ve heard you’ve got a...predicament?”

He was surprised by the inflection of her voice, the way her frown seemed so unsure—although it also felt familiar, like he was watching a video of himself.

Maybe Hazel was right.

He pat the spot on the bed next to his own. “Here. Sit. This is probably going to, uh, take a while. I’m not good at this.”

Reyna smiled grimly. “I know. But even if I can’t help, I’d like to hear you out.” She stared at the floor for a moment. “It’s nice to be the one listening to someone else once in a while, instead of telling everybody else to listen to you.”

“Oh.” Nico stared at the floor for a moment. “Well...here’s my, um, problem.”

“Aside from the fading hands, you mean,” Reyna said. “Don’t think I can’t see that.”

He moved his hands behind his back, but not before glancing at them and affirming her words. “It’s a...guy...problem?”

She raised her eyebrows. “Oh, really.”

“You don’t sound surprised.”

“I’m not.” She sighed. “Look, you know we both suck at this. There’s nothing to be embarrassed about.”

Nico shrugged. “I know. I think I just messed everything up, though. I told him off, and I was mean about it, because I can’t fucking control my temper.”

“Why’d you tell him off?”

He shrugged again. “I don’t know. I think I was...scared, I guess?”

“Scared of what?”

“Of...” He hesitated. “Of...liking someone?”

Reyna shook her head. “Maybe you were, but you’ve liked him for a while, right? So it’s something different.” She pauses in thought. “Did he...say anything?”

He nodded. “Yeah, he...he said he was...” He trails off, groaning. “I can’t even fucking say it. It’s like goddamn Cupid all over again.” He hesitated. “Not that you’re anything like him, obviously. I mean—it wasn’t even him that was the problem. It’s me. I just can’t say stuff to people.” He swallowed and took a breath. “Even though I’m totally rambling right now.”

“Cupid, huh,” Reyna said. She stops to think again for a moment, and then looks up at him. “I think you should see Jason.”

“Jason? Oh, gods, no, he was *there*. He saw it all—well, the first part, at least.”

She raised her eyebrows. “And that doesn’t make it easier?”

“No! He’s going to punch me.”

She chuckled. "I highly doubt that." She then stood, cracking her knuckles. "Do you want me to find him for you?"

Nico looked to the floor. "If you really think he could help me."

"I really think he could," she replied. She then headed for the door, but stopped before she opened it. "And Nico?"

"What?"

"I know you think you messed everything up, but everyone always thinks that about themselves. Will probably thinks it's all his fault, too. I'm sure you guys will work things out."

He stared at her. "When did I ever say it was Will?"

She rolled her eyes. "Gods, Nico, we all *know*. You're so blatantly obvious all the time that I'm surprised it took *him* this long." She sighed, shaking her head and turning the doorknob. "I'd wish you good luck, but I don't believe in it. So I'll tell you instead to man up, di Angelo."

He managed a smile. "In true Roman fashion."

She saluted, Nico returned it, and then she was gone.

Chapter End Notes

lol thanks to everyone who's still reading after that last one

also this just passed 9,000...hmm how cool would it be if it could get 10,000 before it's done...

Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

“There’s actually something I’ve been meaning to tell you about that for a while now.”

Nico forced himself not to cross his arms. This isn’t angry confrontation. This is a friend. “Okay.”

“Yeah.” Jason folded his hands, then unfolded them, and then folded them again. He shifted his weight from foot to foot. “Um, so, I think you should talk to Percy.”

Chapter Notes

It's been two weeks, and for that I apologize. I had the flu, though, and that seems like a valid excuse. Anyway, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

As soon as Nico opened the door for him—because apparently he didn’t want to do it himself—Jason started apologizing.

“It’s probably my fault,” he said. “I started the conversation, I pushed you to say that, and if I had just left as soon as he got there, maybe you guys could’ve worked it out, and—”

“Zeus almighty,” Nico interrupted. “Shut *up*.”

Jason froze in place, blinking.

“And fix your goddamn glasses,” Nico added, reaching up to straighten them.

“Oh,” Jason replied dumbly. “Um. So...are you alright?”

Nico raised his eyebrows. “Yeah. Perfectly fine. I didn’t just have the most mortifying, awful moment of my life or anything.” He coughed. “Um. Yeah. But to correct you—it wasn’t your fault.”

“Oh,” he said again. “So that’s not why you called me here? Reyna said you wanted to talk to me, and she looked like she wanted to punch me, and I figured you were mad at me.”

“No, that’s not why,” Nico replied. “And, for the record, Reyna always looks like she wants to punch you, and I’m *usually* mad at you.”

Jason laughs a little, rubbing the back of his neck. “Ha. Yeah. So, then...what did you want to talk about, exactly?”

Nico sighed. There was no avoiding this now. He forced himself to pick his gaze up from the floor and look Jason in the eye. “Croatia.”

Jason visibly swallowed, shifting his gaze to something over Nico’s shoulder. “Ah.”

“Yeah.”

“There’s actually something I’ve been meaning to tell you about that for a while now.”

Nico forced himself not to cross his arms. *This isn’t angry confrontation. This is a friend.* “Okay.”

“Yeah.” Jason folded his hands, then unfolded them, and then folded them again. He shifted his weight from foot to foot. “Um, so, I think you should talk to Percy.”

Nico stared at him. “What do you mean? I already talked to him.”

He nodded. “I know. I mean, everyone knows, virtually. A lot of people witnessed the conversation.”

“Really?”

His eyes widened. “I mean—not everyone. Just, like, me and Piper. And Annabeth, obviously. Not Will, if you were wondering. I know Will didn’t. And I told everybody that knows not to tell anyone else. I know he still doesn’t know anything about it, unless you told him. But now I’m rambling.”

“Yeah, you are.” *Will still doesn’t know.*

“So, anyway, I think you should talk to Percy, but, like, *really* talk to him. About deep stuff. He—has a lot of experience with stuff. Friendship, love, and, um...”

“Tartarus?” Nico guessed.

Jason nodded. “Yeah. That. And I know you guys usually just joke around, but...I think a real conversation would be good for both of you. Percy—he worries about you, Nico. A lot. He feels responsible for a lot of the shit you’ve been through, even thinks some stuff about himself that’s not true. So I think you should help him clear some of that up, and in return, he will help you.” He paused. “I know you’re going to think this is cheesy, but he’s known you longer than anyone else at camp, he’s been on more quests and stuff with you, and he just *knows* you and your history more than Reyna, Hazel, Will...even me.”

His mind rushed back in time three years, to Westover Hall and Bianca’s green hat and his stupid action figures. To the manticore that almost killed them. To the Hunters that saved them but then proceeded to ruin his life by taking away the one person that still mattered. To Percy, who brought him to camp despite having just lost the girl who mattered the most to *him*.

There was a reason he had once been in love with Percy Jackson. He was one of the most caring and compassionate people on the planet, and he valued his friends and family above all else. He had been willing to die for everyone on the *Argo II*, anyone and everyone at Camp Half-Blood—and, in turn, Nico had sacrificed everything for him, time after time.

He realized in that moment that maybe he was longer infatuated with Percy, no longer interested in anything more with him than friendship, no longer trapped in an endless cycle of pain every time he held Annabeth's hand or smiled in his direction, but he still loved him—loved him like a friend, like a brother.

And he made his decision.

After re-emerging from the shadows, he wondered for a moment if he had not only covered distance, but also travelled back two years in time.

He stood on Percy's fire escape, bracing himself against the handrail as a gust of wind pounded the brick wall behind him. When he turned around, he noticed the tiny moonlace plant, still in the window box despite being shrunk and shriveled. He wondered if Percy would ever move it.

He opened the window—would Percy ever learn to lock it?—and ducked through.

He heard a yelp before he even looked up. When he did, he saw Percy swipe his hand through a misty image, eyes wide. “Nico?”

Nico awkward put his hands in his pockets. “Uh, yeah. Hi.”

“Speak of the devil,” Percy muttered.

“What?”

“Never mind. What are you doing here, and why can’t you just come through the front door?”

“First of all, because I need to talk to you. Second, because I like scaring you.”

“Oh, thanks.” Then he motioned to the spot on his bed next to where he sat. “If you want to talk, I’m all ears.”

He sat down gingerly, leaning forward to rest his elbows on his knees. “Before you ask, by the way, yes, this is ultimately about Will. But first...” He swallowed. He hadn’t been this nervous around Percy since...well, since everything. “I wanted to talk about us.”

He was expecting some kind of stupid joke, but Percy just nodded. “Okay.”

“Okay,” Nico agreed. “So, you know about the stupid crush on you I used to have.”

“You don’t need to call it stupid. It’s fine.”

"Fair enough," he replied. "But what you don't know is what happened in Croatia. You don't know why suddenly, when you came out of the Doors of Death, Jason was acting like my older brother."

"True," Percy said. "He mentioned one time that something happened, but he's never explained it. I didn't want to push him—or you."

So Nico told him. He told him the entire story, start to finish, leaving out no detail.

"I told Cupid I had a crush on you, *had* in the past tense," he finished. "But I think, at that point, I still did. And I couldn't bear the thought that you were in...Tartarus. Suffering the same shit that I'd just escaped from." He swallowed. "I don't think any of us could, really. But me...I somehow felt responsible for it. I felt like I was burdening the entire *Argo* quest and that it was my fault you guys had ended up in there." He hesitated. "I know it's completely irrational."

Percy waited a moment before speaking again, his gaze directed somewhere far away and not focused on anything in the present. "I felt the same way. Not really then, with Tartarus—but before. With...your sister. I woke up every morning with the guilt that I had broken my promise to you, that you were off somewhere with a bunch of ghosts getting into trouble—doing all sorts of things an eleven-year-old shouldn't be doing—and it was all my fault. I think...every time I ever seemed angry with you, I was really angry at myself. For that, I'm so, so sorry."

Nico managed a small smile. "You're forgiven."

Percy smiled, too. "Likewise, for anything you feel you might've done wrong." He then cleared his throat. "So, what's the new dilemma?"

"Dilemma," Nico echoed. "That's a big word."

Percy chuckled. "Annabeth would say it's an SAT word."

Nico grinned at that. "Of course she would. And..." He twisted his skull ring around his finger. "The dilemma is complicated. Will came back to camp for just today, basically to wish everybody merry Christmas or something. But I was talking about him to Jason, and he walked in—"

"And overheard some things you'd rather he not overhear?" Percy guessed.

"Yeah," Nico replied. "Pretty much. So shadow-travelled to my cabin, and then of course he came over, and we sort of fought. He got really mad because I said he—I said he only cares about me because it's his job. And then he left, but before he left, he said...he said he was in love with me."

He said that last part so quietly, and Percy was silent for seconds afterward, so he began to wonder if he had even heard it.

"Well," he finally said, "I can't say I'm surprised."

Nico groaned. "If it's been so obvious this whole time that he—*likes* me or whatever, then why hasn't he said something? And why haven't I noticed?"

Percy shook his head. "Because that's just not how it works. Do you know how long Annabeth and I danced around each other for? Four years. And I thank the gods it didn't take that long for you guys, because that would've been *painful* to watch."

"But it's not over yet," Nico protested. "There's nothing, still. I don't even know what there's supposed to be or what I'm supposed to do now."

"You tell him the truth."

"But I *can't*." He ran his hands through his hair. "That's my problem. You heard how hard it was for me, how long it took me to confess to Cupid—and he was practically trying to kill me. I can't just say something like that out loud, especially to him."

"But you told me," Percy retorted. "You told me after the war, and you did it just fine."

He shook his head. "That was different. Telling someone you used to like them is different. And..." He sighed. "No offense, but Will's different than you. It's so much more *real*."

Percy thought for a moment, and then smiled. "Of course it is. Nico, you need to tell him everything you just told me."

"What?"

"About Croatia. Cupid. All of it."

"Why?"

He took a deep breath. "Because he thinks you're scared of love, but you're not. Deep down inside, you're really not, are you? You're just scared of talking about it, and he needs to know that difference. He needs to know what you've been through, because then he'll understand you."

Nico recalls his first real talk with Will, the one on the roof of his cabin that warm summer night. He had spilled his entire being to him, so it seemed, discussed every aspect of his life...except for that one. That was the one thing he had saved, filed away for later conversation. And that conversation still had yet to come around.

Percy had a good point, he realized.

"No pressure, man," he added after watching Nico contemplate his words. "You should take your time. But at some point...I mean..."

He smiled grimly. "I know. I, of all people, should know that people don't stay around for forever."

Percy nodded slightly. "Yeah."

He stood. "This...was helpful. Thank you." He offered a hand to shake.

Percy refused, however—instead, he stood as well and threw his arms open.

And, at this point, Nico had been getting hugs from so many people that one more didn't seem so bad.

When he finally pulled away, Percy was grinning. "I just talked to Will, you know."

"What?"

"Yeah. I had just finished Iris-messaging him when you came in."

"Why? What the hell were you talking about?"

He just smiled. "I think you'll find out soon enough, Nico."

"I hate you for this. Forget who I was five minutes ago. You're so annoying."

"Just part of the job. Now, go get 'em. And take care."

He couldn't help smiling in return. "Fine. You too, Percy."

And then he stepped into the shadows.

Chapter End Notes

I. Love. Percy. Jackson.

This fandom as of late has made him out to be some kind of annoying, stupid jokester all the time, and I'm not a fan. Bring back the OG Percy Jackson that is kind, compassionate, caring, and infinitely loyal to his friends!

Anyway, I apologize again for this chapter taking so long. Like I said before, I had the flu, which I got after just two weeks of being healthy (because I got sick on Christmas also). Not fun.

Because I have a busy week coming up, I'm not expecting to have another chapter finished until this weekend, but stay tuned. It really depends on how busy work is on Tuesday and Friday, because if I'm just sitting around with no one to tutor (I work in a writing center), I'll work on this. Have a great week, everyone! Oh, and happy birthday, Nico!

Chapter 39

Chapter Summary

“What do you want?”

“Forgiveness,” he replied. “And a second chance.”

Chapter Notes

;))

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When he arrived back at Camp Half-Blood, he noticed that the sun had begun to set. The sky glowed orange and pink on one side, dark purple on the other.

He landed just outside the infirmary, near the porch of the Big House, and whether that location was chosen consciously or not, he decided it was the right place to start. He knocked on the door as a warning and then opened it, stepping through slowly.

“Who’s there?” It was Kayla. She was turned around, placing bottles of pills into a cabinet.

“It’s just me,” Nico replied.

She whirled around. “Nico? Thank the gods. Will’s a *mess*.”

“What?”

“Yeah. He just left as soon as I came in here, and he was crying.” She put down the bottle she was holding and leaned against the counter. “You really should go find him.”

Nico nodded. “I will, but—where do you think he is?”

Kayla shrugged. “If I were him, I’d be at the archery range, probably. I know it’s empty right now—everyone’s getting ready for the campfire.”

“But he sucks at archery.”

“Not when he’s angry.”

“Okay,” Nico replied. “I’ll head over.”

Kayla nods. "Good. And Nico?"

"Yeah?"

"He really—Will really, really cares about you. So...just...keep that in mind."

"I will." He turned around, heading for the door, but stopped himself just as he grabbed the handle. "Kayla?"

"Mhm?"

"I really care about him, too."

She smiled. "I know."

And with that, he left the infirmary.

The air was chilly, but not freezing. It was December, after all, but it was also Camp Half-Blood. Chiron controlled the climate for most days of the year, allowing the occasional snowstorm around Christmastime when the New York weather provided one.

As the sun sunk behind the top of the forest, he considered what he had just said to Percy.
People don't stay around for forever.

He picked up his pace to a run. He passed the cabins and the campfire, which was just getting started, the campers filing into place, faces aglow with golden flames and warm laughter. He passed groups of friends huddled together, sharing secrets and stories about their day. He passed a small boy standing by himself, his hands in his pockets, who looked like he wanted to join the group at the fire, but couldn't, and he smiled at him. The boy's eyes widened, but he smiled back and then walked away. As Nico passed, he realized he couldn't be the one that stayed away from the action any longer. He needed to stop running away from people—he needed to run toward them.

Eventually, he reached the archery range. It was a simple rectangular field, not too large, the line of targets spaced about forty feet away from the chalked line on the ground that marked where to stand. There were ten spaces for archers total. Only one was occupied.

Just by his body language, he could tell Will was upset. He plucked an arrow from his quiver, nocked it, let go almost immediately, and then reached for another one. Judging by the amount of arrows littering the target, he had been at this for a while. At further scrutiny, Nico noticed the slight vibration of his hands, the way he shook out his wrists after each shot like they were sore. His hair was messy and falling in his face. He was panting—not too heavily, but enough that Nico could see it and hear it.

After waiting a moment to see if Will would notice him standing there, he cleared his throat.

He didn't turn around immediately, first finishing his shot, watching it strike the center of the target, and setting down his bow and quiver. Then he saw Nico, and he didn't smile.

"What do you want?"

“Forgiveness,” he replied. “And a second chance.”

Will just stared at him. “I don’t have time for this, Nico.”

He stepped closer. “Please. Will, I need to talk to you. There’s still stuff I haven’t told you, but I want to tell you everything.”

Will spread his hands. “Fine. Go ahead. Spill your heart out, just like I did.”

Nico shook his head. “That’s my problem. I’m *terrible* at doing that, and I’m terrible at responding to other people who do. And I want to tell you about one of the reasons why.” He glanced around. There were no benches nearby, so he simply sat down on the grass and patted the space next to him. “Come on, Will, sit down. Please.”

For a second, he looked like he was going to run away, but eventually he sighed and joined Nico on the ground, silently waiting for him to begin.

Nico took a deep breath, figuring he’d need it. “When we were on the *Argo II*, we stopped in Croatia to find Diocletian’s scepter. Jason and I volunteered to get it from his palace.” He shuddered at his memories, but he knew he couldn’t back down now. “When we met him, he stayed invisible. He was just a voice.”

“Who?” Will asked.

“Cupid. He started attacking both of us, saying he wouldn’t let up until I confessed something. Unfortunately, I...I knew exactly what he was talking about.”

He felt a hand on his arm. “Nico, you don’t have to—”

He shook his head. “No. I do. It’s not even...a big deal, really. I mean, it was at the time, and that’s the problem. But it’s not anymore. What he wanted me to say was...” He turned, making sure he could look Will right in the eye. “I was in love with Percy Jackson.”

Will visibly swallowed, but he didn’t move his gaze. “You...”

Nico nodded. “The key word is *was*. I haven’t been since...well, since that happened, really. After that, I did a lot of thinking.”

Will was still motionless, but he didn’t move his hand. “So, you’re...not, anymore.”

“Correct.” He hesitated. “I think it’s pretty clear now, actually, that...that there’s someone else.”

Will’s eyes widened slightly.

“For so long now,” he continued, “I’ve been really scared of love. Sometimes I feel like everyone I love gets taken away from me—my mom, Bianca, even Percy. But I’ve realized recently that it’s nothing to be afraid of. I love all of my friends, and they’re still here. They’re doing just fine. I’m not scared anymore, and...and I’m ready to try it with you.”

He realized, then, how close they were. Either he or Will had been unconsciously leaning closer to the other. Actually, scratch that—it was probably both of them. Will's eyes were shining, reflecting orange sunlight like stained glass. Each individual strand of his hair was visible and looked more like spun golden thread than ever. And, most importantly, he was almost smiling. Nico decided to smile, too, just to help him along. There was no reason to be sad anymore.

"So," he said.

"So," Will agreed, his smile finally growing. "That was...that was really brave, Nico. Thank you for telling me."

He shrugged. "I just figured I owed you an explanation." He paused, swallowing nervously. "Um, what you said earlier before you left—does that still stand?"

Will bit his lip. "As long as what I overheard earlier does. And, for the record, I wanted to kiss you right then, too."

Nico's breath hitched. Will was *so* close, and just the reminder of the time they sat on his bed and he played guitar made him want to close the remaining distance so much more.

And so he did, leaning forward to rest his forehead against Will's. Will closed his eyes, still grinning, and he was about to do the same when something sprung up in his mind.

"Wait," he said. "This isn't where I wanted this to happen."

Will immediately pulled away. "Wait, what? What do you mean?"

"Just one second," he replied.

He glanced at the ground. The sun was almost completely behind the horizon, and thus, a dark shadow was cast across the whole field. This would do.

He took both of Will's hands and let the darkness swallow them both.

When they re-emerged, he held tight so Will wouldn't fall.

"Where...?" he asked, blinking and swaying in disorientation.

"My cabin roof," Nico explained. When Will stared at him, he felt his face flush. "I, uh, just figured it was fitting. It's sort of where I imagined this would happen."

Will smirked. "So you're saying you've imagined this often?"

"You're ruining this," he groaned. "Can you ever not be annoying?"

He laughed, and it sounded like how chocolate tasted. "Maybe I'll shut up for a while if you kiss me."

“Is that a promise?”

“Just kiss me, Death Boy.”

“Don’t call me that.”

But he did.

Chapter End Notes

It happened.

I told y'all it would eventually ;)

Feel free to freak the fuck out below; I always love reading all of your comments :) Also let me know if at any point during this fic you see any errors or typos--I haven't been proofreading most of it because I'm lazy and too busy for that shit.

Hope you all enjoyed! Have a lovely week :)

The Last One

Chapter Notes

This is it, folks. It's been incredible. I'd like to extend a word of heartfelt thanks to everyone who has been keeping up with it, whether it has been since May or since yesterday. You all leave the most lovely comments and have been making my day every day for nine months now. I can't believe it's over.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Kissing Will Solace could only be described as otherworldly.

Of course, Nico would never say that out loud, because it was extremely cheesy and would be incredibly embarrassing. Also, he was too busy kissing him to say *anything* out loud.

It wasn't completely perfect at first. They sort of just went for it, neither quite sure what he was doing, hands moving from location to location until they eventually settled—Nico's on Will's back and Will's in Nico's hair. They were stable that way, which he figured was important, especially because they were perched on a roof. His feet were going a bit numb from the way he was sitting, but he couldn't bring himself to care, because changing his position would mean breaking away, and that wasn't something he was particularly interested in doing.

At one point, it hit him—*this is my first kiss*.

In a moment of unfiltered expression, he voiced this to Will, and immediately regretted it. Surely he was much more experienced, had done this a million times, and would think—

He grinned. "Mine too." Then he leaned right back in, and Nico followed.

Eventually, of course, they did get tired. Nico found himself panting heavily, and he rest his head against Will's shoulder, opening his eyes.

Will did the same. "Wow."

Nico couldn't think of a word to describe it any better. "Yeah."

They then both burst into a fit of laughter, and as it faded, Will traced the shape of Nico's face with his fingertips.

"Tell me again," he said, "why we didn't do this sooner?"

"Percy interrupted us with that stupid goddamn Iris-message," he replied.

They both started laughing again. Nico brought one of his hands down to hold one of Will's. It was so warm, a vivid contradiction to the chilled air.

"I...really like this," he said.

Will nodded. "Me too. We should do it again sometime."

"So..." He trailed off, searching for the right words. "What are we, then?"

Will shrugged. "Like I said before—whatever we want to be." He paused. "My suggestion is something a little more than just friends."

Nico found himself unable to stop a smile. "I like that idea. A lot."

Will turned his head, burying his face in Nico's hair. "Me too." Then he sighed, and his breath sent a chill down Nico's spine. "I have to go back to my mom's tomorrow."

"Your mom's?" Nico asked.

"Yeah."

"Why don't you just say *home*?"

Will squeezed his hand. "Because *this* is my home."

To that, Nico didn't know how to respond besides turning his head and bringing Will back down for another kiss.

When they pulled away from each other, it wasn't very far. Nico kept Will's face in his hands and their foreheads together.

"I'm going to miss this," Will murmured. His eyes were wide and shining.

Nico almost panicked. Will was *not* going to cry on his watch. "No, you won't," he said. "Because I'm going to come visit you—every weekend."

He blinked, and a tear rolled down his cheek as a result. "Every weekend?"

Nico nodded, brushing it away with his thumb. "Every weekend."

Will laughed softly. "Don't run yourself out with all the shadow-travel. I'm going to have to keep checking your vitals."

Nico shrugged. "I suppose I can tolerate that."

"And I suppose I can tolerate seeing you two days out of seven," he replied, grinning. "My mom..." He frowned a little at the mention of her, and Nico wondered how she was doing. He wasn't going to push it and ask. "She'll be happy to see you, too, especially if you make dinner again."

He smiled. "You'll have to show me more of the city, also."

“We can try on more silly hats and take pictures.”

“And go back to that music store.”

“And fall asleep on the couch.”

Nico closed his eyes. “You have no idea how embarrassing that was. I totally panicked.”

Will chuckled. “It doesn’t have to be embarrassing anymore. It can be normal.”

“Nothing about you will ever be normal, Solace.”

Will shoved his shoulder, but it was gently and he was still grinning. “On the topic of things that happened back at my house...I’m realizing there’s something I never told you.”

“What is it?” Nico asked.

“Remember,” Will began, still holding Nico close by his forearms, “when you were scared about all the kids who were talking about us? You thought they were saying mean shit, but then I swore on the Styx that it wasn’t like that.”

Nico nodded against his forehead.

“Well...the funny thing is, they were actually gossiping about us. As in our relationship. They all wanted to know if we were together or not.”

“Really?”

“Yep. That’s the big secret.”

He laughed a little. “I guess I’m not *that* surprised.”

Will grinned. “Yeah. I think Drew had a betting pool going.”

He sighed. “Of course.” Then he brought Will’s hands into his own, interlocking their fingers. “So...while we’re talking about secrets and stuff...remember that night we spent in the infirmary? Like, most recently, after...you know.” He didn’t really want to bring up Maria again, or Will’s breakdown.

Will nodded.

“So...” He trailed off. “Well...after you were asleep, I sort of...kissed you. On the cheek.” He spilled it out hastily, looking down at their hands.

“I know.”

When he brought his gaze back up, he saw that Will was smiling. “Oh, gods. You...weren’t asleep?”

His smirk grew. “Not really, no.”

Nico normally would have wanted to crawl into a hole and hide there forever, but staying there with Will was really, really nice. He just groaned instead. “Oh my gods. I can’t believe it.”

Will laughed. “You would’ve been *way* more embarrassed if I had told you right then. I knew I shouldn’t.” He kissed him briefly. “It was so sweet. *You’re* so sweet.”

“Am not,” he protested.

Will rolled his eyes. “You literally planned where you wanted our first kiss to be and brought me here. Nico di Angelo, you are the *epitome* of romantic and adorable.”

He huffed in annoyance. “And, Will Solace, you are the epitome of annoying.” He shivered, then, and Will noticed.

“We should get inside. We’re going to get cold.”

Nico tilted his chin and kissed him again—he really, really liked that he could do that now. “Fine, but I’m not bringing you back to your cabin. That’s too much effort.”

Will smiled. “I’m fine with staying in this one if you are.”

And with that, Nico took them both into the shadows.

“Remember that night I stayed over here after we talked on your roof for a while?” Will asked. He laughed a little, and Nico resolved that he would never get tired of hearing it. “I slept in Hazel’s bed.”

Nico looked over at the guy lying next to him, wondering how in the world he got so lucky. “This is better.”

Will squeezed his hand. “Sure is.” He paused for a moment in thought. “Oh, one more thing I forgot to mention. Don’t think I didn’t notice you wearing my Ramones shirt when you came to visit me.”

Nico pulled the duvet over his face. “Oh my gods. I think I totally forgot I was wearing it.”

Will laughed, bringing it back down and leaving his hand against Nico’s chin. “It’s okay. Keep it.”

After a moment of silence, he yawned, and then Will did, too.

“I’m going to sleep.”

“Okay. Good night, Will.”

“Good night, Death Boy.”

He couldn't even bring himself to protest the name as he watched Will's eyes close, one hand curled around his own.

He stayed awake for a few minutes, just taking in everything that had happened that day. Will stumbling in on his conversation with Jason, his confession about Percy and Cupid, the kiss...not to mention all the other kisses that had come after it. Nico found himself smiling at the ceiling and couldn't do anything to stop it.

In his sleep, Will rolled onto his side, pulling him closer. Nico turned to face away from him, allowing himself to be enveloped in warmth from behind.

And, just as he was about to let his eyelids sink shut, he noticed his nightstand.

The napkin, he remembered. *That stupid, goddamn napkin*.

He sat up, carefully untangling himself from Will so as not to wake him, and swung his feet around to rest on the floor. Then he reached down and pulled open the drawer.

It was still there, along with the pen. He picked them both up, holding them as if they were artifacts of museum quality. *I have a crush on Will Solace*, it read, clear as ever despite his messy writing and the semi-smudged ink.

Grinning to himself, he set the napkin down and uncapped the pen. He drew a single line over his words and then began to write.

When he finished, he stared down at his handiwork.

I am in love with Will Solace.

He glanced behind him at the boy who slept so peacefully, pale curls splayed on his pillow and arms extended toward him. He placed the pen and napkin back in the drawer, closed it, and moved back into his previous, much more comfortable position.

Night was Nico's favorite time of day.

He still wasn't quite sure what it was that he so enjoyed—the darkness, the cold, or perhaps the quiet—but he loved it more than ever now that he finally had someone to share it with.

THE END

Chapter End Notes

I'm kind of at a loss for words right now, which is funny considering the fact that I just finished writing a 53,000-word fanfic. Thank you so, so much to everyone who has read

this, and I hope you'll come back to read it again and again in the future (I'm sure I'll be back here soon to read it in its completion for the first time!).

This whole time, I've been keeping my notes for the story in the notes app on my laptop and deleting parts of my outline as I write them. Just now, I deleted the last of it, and I'm holding back tears.

As I already said, this has been an incredible journey and it's going to take me a while to accept that it's over after nine months. It's crazy to think that this all started because there happened to be a really warm, clear night in early May and I happened to have no homework and decided to sit outside for a few hours and just write whatever came to my mind. This is by far my favorite thing I have ever written (it even exceeds my attempt at a novel, which means I should probably try writing another novel).

Again, I extend all the thanks in the world to everyone who has joined me on this adventure, especially those of who have been making my day every day with your lovely comments. I appreciate every single one <3

Peace out for now,
Sarah

(PS: Keep an eye out for sequel-ish one-shots and the like ;))

EDIT: Hey!! This is now nominated for a 2018 Solangelo Fic Award (created by @solange-lol)! Go vote for it on solange-lol.tumblr.com!

2ND EDIT: Yay! We won! Thank you to everyone who voted :)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!